

Achilleid

1.592-661

“At last the timorous Nereid’s trick was exposed. A wood stood high for the rites of Agenorean Bacchus, a forest rising to the sky. In its shade pious matrons were wont to renew the alternating triennial, bearing dismembered cattle, tree trunks torn from the soil, offering the god his favorite frenzies. By law men must go far away. The venerable monarch repeats the rule, the grot is proclaimed out of bounds for males. And that is not enough. At the appointed boundary stands a priestess, figure of fear, searching the approaches lest a violator appear among the female band. Silently Achilles laughed to himself. As he leads the standard of a virgin troop and clumsily waves his great arms (his sex and his mother’s lies are equally becoming), his companions marvel; no more is Deidamia the fairest of her throng, beside proud Aeacides her stature is surpassed by as much as she herself outtops her sisters. But when he dropped the fawnskin from his rounded neck, collecting the straying folds with ivy and binding his flaxen temples with purple fillets and brandishing the wreathed missile with heavy hand, the throng stood amazed and afraid; leaving their rites, they are fain to gather round him and lift their downcast faces. Even as when Euhios at Thebes has relaxed countenance and spirit and satisfied his heart with his native luxury, he lifts garland and headband from his locks and arms the green wand and visits his Indian foes stronger than ever.

Moon in her rosy chariot was scaling the slope of mid-heaven, the hour when Sleep at his most torpid glides down to earth with all his wings and embraces the silent globe .. [Achilles speaks to himself]

So he speaks. And happy that in the night’s thick darkness timely silence lies inert upon his dalliance, he gains his desire by force, launching veritable embraces, with all his heart. All the choir of stars saw it from on high and the young Moon’s horns blushed red. The girl filled wood and mountain with her cries, but Bacchus’ companions shake aside their cloud of slumber and think it a signal for the dance. From all sides the familiar shout is raised and Achilles once more brandishes the wands. First though he comforts the doubting girl with friendly speech: ‘I am he (why do you tremble?) that my sea-green mother almost bore to Jove and sent to Thessaly’s woods and snows to be reared. Nor should I have donned this habit, these shameful clothes, if I had not seen you at the shore’s verge; on your account I yielded, for you I handle wool and bear womanish drums. Why do you weep? You have joined the great sea, a daughter-in-law. Why do you moan? You shall bear mighty grandsons for the sky. As for your father—Scyros shall lie razed by fire and sword and these walls be overturned and pass into swollen tempests before you shall expiate my nuptials by a cruel death. Not so in all things shall I obey my mother.’

But in another quarter Deidamia bewails the trick discovered. When he heard her loud lament and his mind received the familiar voice, he paused and valour yielded to hidden passion. He drops the shield and turning to face the king's threshold as he sits stunned by what has passed and fearing things strange and sudden he addresses Lycomedes in naked weaponry, just as he was: 'Mother Thetis gave me to you, dear father. Banish doubts and fears. Long has such glory awaited you. 'Tis you who send Achilles to the Danai, for whom they search; better loved by me, if it be lawful to say so, than my great parent and dear Chiron. But pay willing heed awhile and take my words in kindly part. Peleus and Thetis your guest join you as father-in-law to their son and bring their gods from either line in support. They ask for one among your maiden train of daughters. Do you give her? Or do you think us a low, degenerate family? You do not refuse? Then join hands and make the covenant, and pardon your child. Already is Deidamia known to me in secret dalliance. For what could resist these arms? Once I had her, how could she repel my strength? Bid me pay for it. I put the weapons aside and return them to the Pelasgi and stay here. Why the gloomy growl? Why change your look? Already you are my father-in-law.' He laid the babe at his feet and adds: 'And already a grandfather. How often will the cruel sword fall? We are a group!' Then the Danai too constrain the king, invoking the rites and faith of hospitality, and Ulysses with soft entreaty. Moved though he was by the discovery of his daughter's wrong and by Thetis' charge, though feeling that the goddess' grand trust is betrayed, he fears to oppose so many destinies and delay the Argive war. Suppose he so desired, Achilles would have spurned even his mother in this. And after all he would not refuse to join himself to such a son-in-law. He yields. Deidamia emerges in shame from secret darkness and in her distraction she does not at first believe that she is pardoned and puts Achilles forward to placate her father.