

At the Edges

by Alex Petrie

I cannot mourn for that which I do not have, yet still I weep alone for that which never was.

For my mind is not constrained to the flesh in which it is resigned. My soul is bound not to one world but thousands of them as my hungry eyes devour yet another page. I am trapped as much as I am freed by that which I read, as I feel the deaths of those who never knew life weigh heavy upon my heart. Because although my soul flits freely between worlds my body will never know, there are those whose lives are fated to be constrained to a page.

Their worlds may be those of wonder, of magic and joy, but still, they are confined to the words written by one more talented than I. Their thoughts and lives dictated by a force they will never know, living out their days never realizing a story beyond their own. I cannot imagine a sadder fate than to be trapped in a gilded cage, confined between two covers. My life may be dull as I trudge through the hours without a quest nor a purpose, but it is not the only life I have known. In flesh, I am human alone, unremarkable and only one of billions. Yet in stories I find myself as so much more. For in those fanciful tales I am free to observe, without laws to keep my feet upon the ground and my head below the clouds. In those endless pages I float freely, laughing and crying at this figment of a new life an author has allowed me a glimpse at.

Not all those stories offer joy, for there is so often a painful price to entering a story. You may see a new life, a new land, but all lives end and all stories come to a close. A character that holds your heart is free to crush it as they please, and like far too many in this life, so often they will. I know it is not their fault, I know that my tears and shouts at the page will change nothing, but still, it is for them I weep when the author's cruel pen strikes them down. It is irrational to be so hurt by that which isn't real, yet still, my heart bleeds out onto the page before me. It will do so again and again if I love their story, perhaps because of that pain not in spite of it. Perhaps that is the reason tragedies are so renowned, so beloved yet hated for the phantom scars that they leave us with upon the last page.

The tale of Achilles and Patroclus is one such poignant tragedy. Yet still, it remains a beloved tale as old as time, one amongst so many ill-fated young loves. I know its twists and turns, know the fate that will befall these heroes, yet the hot tears still fall. The bitter taste of grief is on my tongue, a flavour I have known before and will know again as once more Paris' arrow flies true. Still, I know that this is a tale I shall live in again, a book that I will pour over once more while tears stain my cheeks. Because to live in that world of heroes and monsters, to read of doomed love I know not the true sting of, is a breath of fresh air for my fanciful mind, even knowing the fate that awaits those characters I have grown to so cherish.

And as once more I weep, words flowing out my fingers-tips like the tears I shed. I hope one day to create a world, to write a life worth grieving over for some other soul untethered by this world. I dream to think that I might be able to inspire such emotion from another through my words, and however unlikely it truly is, I think it's still a sweet dream.

A dream I am allowed because of my soul and grief heavy heart. A dream I am allowed, for no author pens my fate. I will have no grand destiny, no magic, no great fate beyond my knowledge. But I do have this freedom.

At least I hope I do. Hope that these thoughts are my own, that your soul does not float over my story as you observe silently. Hope that Achilles shared not my thoughts as his soul strained at the edges of his tale.

But it cannot be so for my soul is free of pages and prose, free to fly to whatever world or heartache I choose.

That is until you turn this page and I will vanish as he has done.