

Courtship by quotes

(prompt fic)
by athens7

::

::

::

Adagio

(Jack's pov)

What is he reading? I have to find out, at all costs.

It's a late afternoon, and we are in the library. He skipped all today's divs. I've been searching for him for all day, and now it turns out that he has been here for the entire time.

What is he reading?

(On the other hand, this obsession I seem to be nurturing for this boy, this moral imperative I feel right down in my marrow to seek him and talk to him and pester him and make him look at me... Well, that is a matter better left altogether unexplored.)

Oh, sod it.

"What are you reading?" I say unannounced, leaning over his shoulder.

He literally jumps. He never seems to notice my arrival. I cannot tell yet whether that is a very good sign, or a very bad one. He makes an attempt at hiding the page he was reading, but my eyes are faster.

Out, damn'd spot! out, I say! — One; two: why, then

'tis time to do't. — Hell is murky. — ¹

Macbeth. Oh. Oh.

I sit in front of him, on the other side of the narrow, dark mahogany table.

The weak light of the candles casts his fine features in rich gold and sensuous shadows, making him look like some Caravaggio's cherub.

He doesn't look at me, his hands closed in tight fists over the book. His jaw is so firmly clenched that for a moment I'm afraid he is going to crack his teeth.

I let some minutes pass.

Then... Slowly, so slowly that my arm is trembling, my hand moves towards him, until my fingertips are grazing his white knuckles. Using only my pads, I start caressing them in tiny, repetitive circles, hypnotic movement and elusive contact that send shivers and heat running along my arm and right to the centre of my stomach. His eyes flutter shut, if only for a moment. He recovers quickly, but his eyes finally meet mine, and his fists gradually lose their hold on thin air. I take his left hand, raising it upwards; I study his palm like a map to an undiscovered country.

"I can't see anything here. You're clean," I say. He does look at me then, and what I see in his gaze is so terrible, so devastating (it's fury and resentment and desolation and heartache and hopeless need to believe, just this once, and, and,) that fear grips me, almost crushing my windpipe. I have gone too far, stupid stupid stupid, what were you thinking —

"I hope you don't mind one stain or two," he says.

"I'm not afraid of witches", I reply.

"Sorry, what?"

¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 1, 26-40.

"What?" I repeat dumbly. The spell has broken, and I feel like an idiot. And I am blushing.
"You are one of the most bizarre creatures I have ever met, do you know that? Can I call you Puck?"

Wait, was that a joke? Oh dear, we have known each other for barely a month and already I don't know if I can live without him.

I clear my throat, put my hands under the table. He closes the book, rises to his feet, comes to stand next to me.

"Shall we go to dinner?" he says, half smiling.

"I — yes. Yes."

::

::

::

Allegro

(Patrick's pov)

"Jack?"

"Hmm?"

"Come here, will you?"

He puts down the toxicology monograph he was distractedly glancing through, joins me in the corner dedicated to Latin and Greek authors.

"Yes?"

"Here, read," I say, thrusting the little book in his hands. He starts to read aloud, without checking the contents.

"Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris. / Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior²...
Patrick!"

He stares incredulously at me, eyes wide and cheeks red, fumbling with the book as if it has just burst into flames.

"My, my, Doctor, you had never given me the impression of being such a prude before."

"There is a time and a place for everything, you sinful satyr!"

I keep smiling. He sighs, opens the book again, finds a page.

"There" he says. I read.

"Pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo³ -- oh, I see, and I am the child between the two of us?"

"You are right, I beg forgiveness," he laughs, taking back the book. "You want gravitas, you shall have it, dear sir. So, let me see..."

His long fingers skim over the spines of the various texts, searching.

"Ha! Here it is. For your eyes only, so to speak."

"φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος τηέοισιν / ἔμμεν ὤνερ ὅστις ἐναντίος τοι⁴ — Jack..."

"Go on, a few verses more."

"Very well... ἰζάνει καὶ πλασίον ἄδου / φωνεύσας ὑπακούει / καὶ γαλαίσας ἰμμερόεν τὸ δὴ 'μάν / καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόασεν, / ὡς γὰρ εὐίδον βροχέως σε, φώνας / οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἶκει ..."

At some point during my declamation, his eyes fell closed. After I fall silent, he stays still for a moment or two, then finally looks at me. All of a sudden, my throat feels very tight.

"I missed your impeccable Greek pronunciation."

² CATULLUS, *Carmen LXXXV* ("I hate and I love. Why I do this perhaps you ask. I do not know, but I sense that it happens and I am tormented.")

³ *Catullus, Carmen XVI* ("I will sodomize you and face-fuck you". It has been called "one of the filthiest expressions ever written in Latin — or in any other language, for that matter.")

⁴ "Blest as the immortal gods is he, / the youth who fondly sits by thee, / and hears and sees thee all the while / softly speak and sweetly smile. / 'Twas this deprived my soul of rest, / and raised such tumults in my breast; / for while I gazed, in transport tost, / my breath was gone, my voice was lost" (SAPPHO, fragment 2 (Bergk), *The Ode to Anactoria*, or *To a Woman*, as translated by Ambrose Philips, 1711).

"Did you?"

"Have you ever wondered who carved the opening verse of this composition on the chair you used to sit on in the refectory?"

"... A-and this, in your humble opinion, is the most appropriate location where to make such a confession?"

He actually winks. I take the book from his hands. Vengeance is mine.

"I rest my case" I declare, and offer him my final weapon.

"Ἐν ἰσχυοῖς μὲν ἵπποι / πύρος χάραγμ' ἔχουσι / καὶ Πάρθιους τις ἀνδρας / ἐγνώρισεν τιραῖς⁵..."

"Yes, go on."

"...But from all men else a lover / I can easily discover, / For upon his easy breast / Love his brand-mark hath imprest."

I am no longer staring at him, rather at his neck, at that crossroads of clavicles and acromion and skin where, underneath all the layers of clothing and civility, the twin scars even now are throbbing with the flow of his hot, hot blood.

I know what his blood tastes like, I realise, and suddenly I'm painfully aroused.

I find the strength to tear my gaze away, to look at him, and it's a mistake. Because his pupils are dilated, his lids heavy, his lips parted, and we have to go, now, now, now.

"I think it's time for supper" I say, my tone clear and my legs quivering.

"Yes. Ahem. Yes, it is. Let's go."

::

⁵ ANACREON, *Ode LV* ("Horses plainly are descry'd / By the mark upon their side: / Parthians are distinguished /By the mitres on their head.")