

The water in her cup gyrating, basked under the sunlight.
A fruit salad sat, flourishing under their touch.

Dainty feelings floated in the air, murmurs of names blossomed like wildfire.
The sun glimpsed over the horizon, Aimée Latendresse was there to see it with Achilles Sauvageon.

Falling in love with Achilles was different, one of a kind. In this small perception of a world, they found each other. Aimée still vividly remembered the day, where his face was too close for comfort. She could physically smell the scent of rose petals and mint from his jacket.

A scent, she remembered telling him about it.

So, when Achilles's face dawned even closer— when his lips sealed the gap tight against hers. At that moment Aimée knew that with him, she wouldn't be lost. He was and is the right path, he was the home she had hoped for ever since they barged into each other's lives.

She felt the bed stirred beside her, she chose to keep her eyes closed. There was a slight kiss to her temple, and a soft *good morning* hushed into her ears. For a moment, she wished she had gotten up and embraced him. She wished she had said good morning too, and kissed him goodbye.

Yet, a part of her ceased to do so. She remained still on the bed, until the door to their shared apartment opened and closed. She lay unmoving on the bed, she can't remember how long passed by. Nor how uncomfortable the kiss felt on her cheek. All she knew was, the sun waved good morning— and she had to drag herself out of bed with a heavy body.

She managed to get through her morning routine just fine, surprisingly not making a mess of herself. Aimée was surprised, for mucking up had made itself an unwanted guest in her routine.

She accepted it nonetheless, glad that she didn't have to feel any worse than she felt right now.

She walked herself out the bedroom door, stepping into the living room. The first thing she noticed was a cold breeze that brushed past her. Too cold for a summer, too chilly for a shared apartment. She made her way to the kitchen, and started on her breakfast.

Breakfast, that she was yet again eating alone.

She stirred alive a cup of coffee, placing the plate of bacon, sunny side ups, and toast onto the table. She took a sip of the coffee first, wanting to savour the bitterness. The sudden heat against her cold tongue was a bit disturbing, almost *throwing her off*. Aimée shrugged it off, like she always did.

I'm just overthinking, she thought.

That night, she slipped into bed. The night fell upon the bustling town, and once again she found no sign of any life down the hallway. She kept her eyes closed, only she knew how awake she was.

That night, she felt some part of her missing. His side of the bed has already gotten cold, too cold for comfort.

When the sun shone through the window. She shifted. Something— no, *another body* shifted after her. She calmed her heart, listening to the rapid breathing behind her slowly lull into one of a normal speed. She drew her lips into a thin line, letting his arms drape over her like they always used to.

Although his presence was next to hers, she felt no warmth.

After a few minutes, he stirred awake. Pressing a soft kiss to her nape, he murmured her good morning. *Good morning* she replied back, voice hushed. He chuckled, yet it only worsened her fear. It wasn't a good morning, that was for sure.

He finally got out of bed, and she only dared to move after the room to the bathroom door closed. She bit on her nail, something unsettling swirled in her stomach. Yet, she forced herself to move to the kitchen. She still made him breakfast, still packed for his lunch. There wasn't a reason to, it was her *responsibility*.

That's what she told herself.

She folded up the bento with ease, he stood leaning on the counter with a smile. For a moment, she got so lost in her thoughts she realised. She realised sickly, that this was purely a routine— a thing she did more out of habit than anything.

At that moment, she felt the wall she'd built up finally shattered.

Her hands paused, and the unsettling feeling in her stomach only intensified. Achilles was still grinning when Aimée passed him the neatly packed box, their hands touched and her stomach *churned*. Aimée pulled her hand back harshly, Achilles stared at her in shock.

She only realised a few seconds later, what she had really done. Achille smiled, reassuring her. *You're tired, I know. I'll get going now.* He said, grabbing his bag,

She nodded, picking at her nails. *Achilles, I'll see you tonight. Stay safe.* Achilles's face brightened, and he nodded enthusiastically. When he left, Aimée's gaze stayed at the entrance door. She only moved her eyes away when another sound caught her interest.

It didn't feel cold anymore, it just felt... suffocating. It was almost like the coldness turned into emptiness, and swallowed her up in it.

Aimée stared up at the clock, and sighed. He broke the promise, again. She wrapped the blanket around her. This time, she turned on the heater. She slept, engulfed in heat and a part of her— warm and somewhat relieved, he didn't come home.

Over the span of the next few weeks, Achilles barely appeared in her life. Almost like she was living her life alone, like only she occupied this shared apartment. She didn't complain, nonetheless. She only continued to move on with her life, doing what she had to do.

Everyday, she would slip into bed. At one point, she would feel the bed dip at near midnight. Then, the bed would dip again when the sun barely peeked through the horizon. His arms would leave her body, and his side of the bed would get cold again.

Empty, again.

Then, she got used to being empty. She found more comfort in the cold bed than she had ever found comfort in him. A sense of relief washed over her, and she found herself lost in her feelings. For a moment. She pondered about their love.

Were they going through their so-called cooling down phase, or were they just falling apart?

Aimée didn't dare to even think about the continuation, she flipped around. For many nights due, she finally faced the side he no longer occupied. That night, she slept better than she had ever done.

Another week passed without Achilles, and surprisingly she found herself liking it more. She tried reading, she tried growing plants, she tried things that didn't involve loving *him* but her.

She was making lunch when it happened, the sudden hands that wrapped around her waist. Signifying his arrival, that rarely ever happened now. Aimée found that her heart didn't beat for him, not like the way it used to even when he only held her hands.

She felt caged in, being in his arms. It felt wrong, for she should have felt safe in his arms. Not discomfort, *not* the feeling of wanting to desperately pry his hands off her.

At that moment, she felt more dread than being alive. The feeling of being alive, that he used to bring to her.

Her shoulders were heavy, too heavy. She felt tired, drained, emotions she never thought she would have felt with him.

He pulled away from her, arms still snuggled around her waist. He smiled, a man of features too pretty to be true. Yet for once, his face scared her. She stared down at the pan, making busy of herself by adding ingredients to the dish.

He snuggled into her, humming at the smell that flowed to his nose. *It smells delicious*, he whispered. His fingers crept to her hips, drumming his fingers against it. She only forced up a smile, dread still spiralling in her head.

She can't breathe, it's hard to move, she doesn't feel like herself.

Achilles finally pulled away from her, she finally let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. *Aimée* he whispered again, *finish cooking soon alright?*

Aimée nodded, and he finally left the kitchen. She uncurled her fist, dropping her head and clenching her fingers around the benchtop. She normalised her breathing, keeping herself in place.

Breathe, Aimée, breathe.

Later, she sat down with him on the dining table. They shared a few laughs and giggles about his work, and she would send him off again. She stood by the door, sending him the *oh so* warm smile as he drove off. Then, she closed the door and continued on about her day.

She should have done that, but she didn't. She packed up the noodles, and handed it over to him with the best smile she could muster. Achilles looked at her in shock, yet he took over the noodles nonetheless. *I'll be off now.*

She nodded in silence.

She didn't wave him off, but closed the door instead. Achilles felt something in his turn, and a wave of sadness that rolled over him.

When she sat down, body leaned against the window pane. She remembered the scent of the wildflowers, the sun heavy against her back. The day where she felt fireworks, the drums of her heart, and her flushed cheeks all in one.

The day she felt alive, for he had brought home love for her.

Achilles met Aimée when he was 23, a fresh graduate from university. He was a coward, at least to say. Yet she? She was different. Maybe it was in the way she talked, but she was confident, powerful, *everything* that he wasn't. Her humorous personality drew everyone in, and soon everyone started liking her. Achilles was one of the many, it was something he couldn't control. Her black, silky hair that floated down her back. Her slim, fair fingers looked too good near her red lips.

It was something about her that made her beautiful to *not just* Achilles, but many others. So when Achilles bumped into *the* Aimée, he was nothing but a stuttering mess. Yet, all she had done was draw him closer with the brightest smile. She leaned forward, close enough her breath was hovering near his ears. *It's fine*, she whispered and pulled away.

He was left in place, face red as a tomato. Skipped to a few months later, he had found himself hand in hand with Aimée. It felt like a fever dream, to claim and be able to love someone everyone else had wanted. It felt even more unreal, that she had picked him— *Achilles*, out of all people. He wasn't the type to complain, though.

To the present, Achilles is proud to say now that he knew most of Aimée. The number of years they've been together, living and breathing the same air. It's hard to say Achilles doesn't know anything. So, when there's a behaviour change in Aimée, he picked it up right away. It's hard not to, when all he wanted to focus on is her.

Yet, as the behaviour change slowly got obvious— Achilles realised what she needed isn't space anymore. Yet, he could only hopelessly watch as his loved one strayed further and further away from him. He knew he couldn't do anything. If he did, it'll only damage the relationship more. Achilles didn't want that, even if it meant losing her.

Even if it meant, one day her heart will beat for someone else.

Achilles pursed his lips into a thin line, and threaded his fingers together. *My love, let us talk. sit, have a cup of tea.* Achilles saw the way Aimée hesitated, before she took the spot beside him. He ignored the tear in his heart, and reminded himself over and over what he was here to do. *I'm here to fix this, to let her go— to let us go.* He thought bitterly.

He was the one that started it, now he was the one to end it.

Ironic, isn't it?

Achilles finally looked up, greeting his lover with the best smile he could muster. *My love... Time is a wonderful thing isn't it? Yet, it's also so frightening, what it can do to a person...* Achilles paused, watching as confusion buried up in her eyes. *Time brought us together; time became one of us, time became a responsibility Aimée. Time changes, and so do we... right?* Achilles tried his hardest to not let his cracked voice sound obvious.

Yet, when the confusion faded and her eyes morphed into one of shock— Achilles knew it was over.

Achilles... she whispered, he only held up a hand to stop her. *If it's out of pity, I don't want it Aimée.* He tore his eyes from hers and broke eye contact. He's scared, scared that he would do something out of hand if they held eye contact any longer.

He loved her. He still loves her.

It's a fact he couldn't escape.

Aimée clenched her fist, struggling against her conscience. Yet, she still fought against it and reached out. Her arms came to wrap around the male's shoulder, engulfing him in a warm hug. He moved on instinct, yet he stopped mid way when he realised– he didn't have the right to hug her back.

This was merely comfort, an act of kindness that expressed her apology. She pulled away after a few minutes, and threw him a tight smile.

It was the most she could do, as she once thought about forever with this man.

Yet, the fact that they were a beautiful couple wouldn't change. Aimée tucked her knees into her arms again, the heavy weight finally lifted from her shoulders. Her heart felt content, and she knew the next time she saw him– she would be able to smile again.

Just like the way they started, as friends.

Falling out of love with him felt like drinking bitter tea; overwhelming, yet comforting.

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