

Chocolate Milk

Miles Manning

It's a hot day, you're sitting on the side of the road waiting for a bus. It's the middle of nowhere and you can feel the heat radiating from the road. You haven't put enough sunblock on this week, now the skin is peeling from the back of your neck. The paddocks on the other side of the road are obscured as the heat drifts up. Your friend sits next to you, he walked you here. When the bus comes, he'll walk back home where you spent all day together labouring in the fields. The two of you lean against each other as you pass a bottle of chocolate milk between you, careful to take small sips, to not be overeager. You count the cars together, choose a colour see who will get the most. He talks about a new game he found, and you're struck by how the sun hits his skin and makes him look like gold, he is Apollo and you wonder whether this is how Icarus felt, blinded by the sun. He glances over at you and you think you should say something, but there are too many reasons you shouldn't. You grin at him and start chugging the chocolate milk. He looks at you outraged and tries to wrestle the bottle from your hands. It slips from your hands and spills across the asphalt and you look up at him. He sighs and tells you you should have been more patient.

It's the last week before school starts up again. You're sitting next to him again, talking. This time you're next to a stream with your legs dangling in, the cool water and the trees overhead giving you some relief from the heat. He brought some milk again, today he brought you a bottle each. It's strawberry milk which you can't stand, but you don't tell him that because you know it's his favourite. You hate that school is going to start up again soon, it means you won't get to spend every day together anymore. You hate to sound so selfish, but you don't like that you'll have to share his attention with other people again soon. He is the most important person in the world to you. You think about saying so, but you can't. An eel squirms out from beneath the rocks across the water. He spots it points it out to you. You grin at him and splash water at it, scaring it off. He's finished his milk, but you've barely touched yours.

School's been back for a couple of weeks now. He's starting to drift away. You can feel it.

It's the middle of the year, you and he don't share many classes, but you try to spend as much time with him as you can, but you don't feel like he's making the same effort. You're sitting next to him again, out on the school field. Neither of you has any milk. It's dreary and the ground is damp, making your shorts wet. You don't talk, just watch the younger classes play football. You wish you knew what to say to him. It frustrates you and you dig your fingers into the soft ground.



He looks at you and asks if you're okay. You say you're fine and the two of you sit in silence again. Someone calls out to him and he stands up and walks away. You miss the summer.

It's spring holidays. You invite him over to your house. He declines, he's spending time with his girlfriend. You say that it's fine and re-schedule for the next week. You want to tell him, this time you're going to tell him. The two of you sit in the garden, he is in front of the yellow carnations and you are between the lemongrass and the pink anemones. You have brought chocolate milk for the two of you, so you pass one over to him. He tells you he doesn't like chocolate milk anymore and you frown. You are silent for a while. He pulls at the flower petals above him and asks you why he is here. You say that there is something you want to tell him, and you say that it's hard to get the words out. You drink your milk and pick at the lemongrass beside you. You tell him how you feel. You cannot look at his face, but you tell him how he is Adonis, how he is beauty and that he belongs beside the flowers that your mother planted. You tell him how you cannot bear that he spends so much time away from you. You tell him that you hate how he's drifting away. You tell him you love him. You look up at him. He walks forward and hits you in the face. You hold your jaw. He tells you to stay away, to never talk to him again. He leaves. It hurts, it happened exactly how you thought it might and it still hurts so bad. You didn't expect it to go any differently, that's just how things were. It starts to rain.