



Menelaos & Patrocles – painting by Ruud van Straten 120 x 90 cm / 2023

THE SONG OF THE BORROWED ARMOR – A LOVE STORY

The war had begun to rot.

It clung to the air like smoke, thick and sour, drifting through the Greek camp with the persistence of a curse. Men sharpened spears not because they believed in victory, but because they feared what would happen if they stopped. Horses stamped nervously. Fires burned low. Even the sea seemed tired of carrying ships filled with men who no longer remembered why they had come.

And Achilles refused to fight.

He sat in the dim glow of his tent, bronze limbs folded, jaw set in a line that could have been carved from stone. His armor — the armor that had once terrified entire armies — lay untouched in the corner, gleaming faintly like a sleeping beast.

Patroclus watched him from the entrance, hands clasped behind his back, heart aching with a familiar mixture of devotion and helplessness. Achilles' silence was a fortress, and Patroclus had spent a lifetime trying to climb it.

“Say something,” Patroclus whispered.

Achilles didn't move.

Outside, the camp stirred with the restless sounds of men preparing for another day of bloodshed. But inside the tent, time felt suspended — as if the world were holding its breath, waiting for Achilles to break.

He didn't.

Patroclus stepped closer. “They need you.”

“They need a symbol,” Achilles said, voice low. “Not me.”

“You are the symbol.”

Achilles turned his head, finally meeting Patroclus' gaze. His eyes were dark, storm-heavy, filled with a fury that had nowhere to go.

“Agamemnon insulted me,” he said. “He took what was mine. He expects me to fight for him as if I am his hound.”

Patroclus swallowed. “You would let men die for your pride.”

Achilles' jaw tightened. “I would let them die for his pride.”

Patroclus opened his mouth to argue — but footsteps approached.

Menelaos.

The king entered without waiting for permission, his cloak dusted with sand, his expression carved from exhaustion and calculation.

“Achilles,” he said, “the Trojans press harder every day. Hektor grows bolder. Our men are losing hope.”

Achilles didn’t look at him. “Then let them lose it.”

Menelaos’ eyes flicked to Patroclus — and something shifted.

A thought.

A strategy.

A temptation.

“Patroclus,” Menelaos said softly, “walk with me.”

Patroclus hesitated, glancing at Achilles, but the warrior had already turned away, retreating into the silence that had become his armor.

Outside, the air was sharp with the scent of sweat and metal. Menelaos led Patroclus toward the ridge overlooking the battlefield. The Trojan camp flickered in the distance like a second horizon of fire.

“You love him,” Menelaos said.

Patroclus froze. “That is—”

“Obvious,” Menelaos finished. “To anyone with eyes.”

Patroclus looked away, heat rising in his cheeks.

Menelaos stepped closer. “You want him to see you. Truly see you. Not as a companion. Not as a shadow. But as someone worthy of him.”

Patroclus said nothing.

Menelaos’ voice softened, almost coaxing. “He will not fight. But the men need Achilles. They need the sight of him. The sound of him. The idea of him.”

Patroclus frowned. “What are you saying?”

Menelaos turned toward the camp, toward the tent where Achilles’ armor lay untouched.

“Wear it.”

Patroclus blinked. “What?”

“Wear his armor,” Menelaos repeated. “Lead the charge. Let the Greeks believe Achilles has returned. Let the Trojans tremble. Let Achilles see your devotion.”

Patroclus felt his pulse quicken. “He will be furious.”

“He will be moved,” Menelaos countered. “He will see your courage. Your loyalty. Your love.”

Patroclus closed his eyes.

He imagined Achilles’ face — shock, awe, pride.

He imagined the battlefield chanting Achilles’ name.

He imagined, for one impossible moment, being his equal.

When he opened his eyes, Menelaos was watching him with a knowing expression.

“You already want to,” the king murmured.

Patroclus swallowed. “I want him to be proud of me.”

“Then give him a reason.”

Patroclus hesitated only a heartbeat longer.

Then he nodded.

Menelaos smiled — a small, dangerous smile.

“Good,” he said. “Then let the world see Achilles return... even if only in outline.”

Patroclus returned to the tent with trembling hands.

Achilles didn’t notice at first.

He sat with his back turned, polishing a dagger that didn’t need polishing, lost in the storm of his own thoughts. Patroclus approached quietly, heart pounding, hands shaking as he reached for the armor stand.

The bronze was cold beneath his fingers.

He lifted the breastplate — heavier than he expected — and slipped it over his head. The weight settled onto his shoulders like a destiny he had not earned. The greaves followed, then the bracers, then the cloak.

Finally, he reached for the helmet.

The horsehair crest shimmered in the lamplight, a crown of war.

“Patroclus.”

Achilles’ voice cut through the silence.

Patroclus froze.

Achilles turned, eyes widening as he took in the sight before him — his armor, his silhouette, worn by the man he loved.

“What are you doing?” Achilles whispered.

Patroclus swallowed. “What you will not.”

Achilles stood, fury and fear warring in his expression. “Take it off.”

“No.”

“Patroclus—”

“You refuse to fight,” Patroclus said, voice trembling but steady. “But the men need you. They need hope. They need the idea of Achilles.”

Achilles stepped closer, eyes burning. “You will die.”

Patroclus held his gaze. “Then let me die for something.”

Achilles’ breath caught.

Patroclus lifted the helmet.

“Let me do this,” he whispered.

Achilles reached out — but too late.

Patroclus lowered the helmet onto his head.

And Achilles saw not a boy he had grown up with, not a companion, not a shadow — but a warrior.

A hero.

A man he loved.

Achilles’ voice broke. “Patroclus...”

But Patroclus was already walking away.

Toward the battlefield.

Toward the lie.

Toward the arrow that waited for him.

PART 2 – The Arrow

Dawn broke like a wound.

A thin red line split the horizon, bleeding light across the plains of Troy. The Greek camp stirred with a tension that felt almost electric — men whispering, horses stamping, shields clattering as if the metal itself sensed something was coming.

And then they saw him.

A figure in gleaming bronze stepped from Achilles' tent, the horsehair crest catching the rising sun. The armor was unmistakable — the armor that had once turned the tide of battles, the armor that had made kings tremble.

“Achilles!” someone shouted.

The cry spread like wildfire.

“Achilles has returned!”

Men surged forward, hope igniting in their chests. Even the sea breeze seemed to shift, carrying the chant across the camp.

But it was not Achilles.

It was Patroclus.

Inside the helmet, his breath fogged the bronze. His heart hammered against the breastplate — Achilles' breastplate — as if trying to break free. The weight of the armor pressed into his shoulders, heavy with borrowed glory.

He felt powerful.

He felt terrified.

He felt seen.

Menelaos watched from a distance, arms crossed, expression unreadable. He had orchestrated this moment, but even he seemed struck by the sight — Patroclus transformed into a myth.

Patroclus mounted a chariot, gripping the reins with trembling hands.

“Drive,” he told the charioteer.

The horses lunged forward, and the battlefield opened before him like a vast, hungry mouth.

The Trojans saw him next.

A ripple of panic tore through their ranks as the sun struck the goldleaf details of the armor, turning Patroclus into a blazing omen.

“Achilles!” they cried. “Achilles returns!”

Even Hektor, standing tall in his chariot, felt his breath catch. Achilles — the unstoppable, the divine-touched, the wrath of Greece — had not fought in weeks. His return could shatter the Trojan line.

Patroclus raised his shield.

The Greeks roared behind him, surging forward with renewed fury. Spears clashed, chariots thundered, dust rose in choking clouds. Patroclus plunged into the fray, swinging his sword with a desperate, burning intensity.

He fought well.
He fought bravely.
But he did not fight like Achilles.

Hektor noticed.

“That is not Achilles,” he murmured.

Patroclus cut down a Trojan soldier, then another, but his movements lacked Achilles’ terrifying precision. His stance was different. His rhythm was different. His fury was human, not godlike.

Hektor narrowed his eyes.

“Archers!” he shouted. “Aim for the heart!”

The archer stood on a distant ridge, bow drawn, breath steady. He had been trained to find the smallest weakness — a gap in armor, a sliver of exposed flesh, a heartbeat’s hesitation.

Patroclus gave him all three.

The arrow flew.

A thin whistle cut through the chaos — sharp, unmistakable, slicing the air like fate itself.

Patroclus turned his head.

He saw the arrow.
He saw the archer.
He saw the sky behind it — impossibly bright, streaked with orange and gold.

Then the arrow struck.

Not in the shoulder.
Not in the ribs.
But directly in the heart.

A perfect shot.
A fatal shot.

The impact was brutal — a sudden, shocking punch that stole his breath. The bronze dented inward, the arrowhead piercing through the armor’s gap and sinking deep into flesh.

Patroclus gasped.

His sword fell.
His knees buckled.
And then he screamed.

A single scream.

A raw, primal, soul-splitting cry — not of pain, but of terror.
A cry that tore through the battlefield.

A cry that ripped through the Greek camp.
A cry that reached the tent where Achilles sat in silence.

Achilles froze.

The dagger slipped from his hand.

“Patroclus.”

Menelaos heard it too.

The scream cut through him like a blade. It was not the cry of a soldier. It was not the cry of a hero. It was the cry of a man dying in borrowed armor — a man Menelaos had pushed into the jaws of war.

His stomach dropped.

“No,” he whispered.

He ran.

He didn’t shout orders.
He didn’t call for guards.
He didn’t think.

He sprinted down the ridge, sand slipping beneath his feet, heart pounding with a sickening rhythm.

He reached Patroclus just as the young man collapsed onto the dust, the arrow jutting from his chest like a cruel ornament.

“Patroclus!” Menelaos dropped to his knees. “No, no, no...”

Patroclus’ breath rattled, shallow and wet. Blood bubbled at his lips. His eyes fluttered, unfocused.

Menelaos cupped his face with shaking hands.

“I’m here,” he whispered. “I’m here, I’m sorry, gods forgive me, I’m sorry...”

Patroclus blinked slowly, as if trying to understand why Menelaos — the king who had tempted him — was now the one holding him.

Menelaos swallowed hard.

“I should never have asked this of you.”

Patroclus tried to speak — to say Achilles’ name — but only a thin, broken sound escaped.

Menelaos felt something inside him crack.

He slid his arms beneath Patroclus’ body, lifting him with a gentleness that felt like penance.

“I’m taking you to him,” he whispered. “To Achilles. He will know. He will see. He will forgive you.”

But he knew Achilles would never forgive him.

Menelaos carried Patroclus through the battlefield, stumbling under the weight — not of the body, but of the guilt. Greek soldiers parted in stunned silence. Trojan archers lowered their bows. Even Hektor watched, jaw clenched, as the king bore the dying man away.

Blood dripped from the arrow wound, leaving a trail behind them — a red thread stitching tragedy into the earth.

Patroclus’ head lolled against Menelaos’ shoulder.

“Stay with me,” Menelaos whispered. “Please. Stay with me.”

But Patroclus’ breaths were fading, each one thinner than the last.

Menelaos reached the edge of the camp — and saw Achilles running toward them.

The look on Achilles’ face was something no king could bear.

A mixture of terror, disbelief, and a fury so deep it bordered on divine.

Menelaos slowed.

He could not hide what he carried.

He could not soften it.

He could not undo it.

Achilles reached them, eyes wide, chest heaving.

“Give him to me,” he said.

Menelaos hesitated — not out of reluctance, but out of shame.

“Achilles...” he whispered. “I—”

“Give him to me.”

Menelaos lowered Patroclus into Achilles’ arms.

The warrior cradled him as if he were made of glass, as if the slightest movement might shatter him further. Achilles pressed his forehead to Patroclus’, tears falling freely.

Menelaos stepped back.

He could not bear the sight.

He could not bear the sound of Achilles’ grief — a sound that tore through the camp like a storm.

He could not bear the truth:

He had caused this.

He bowed his head.

“I am sorry,” he whispered — not to Achilles, but to Patroclus.

Because Achilles would never forgive him.
But Patroclus might.

The Moment Achilles Breaks

Achilles sank to his knees.

The world around him dissolved — the battlefield, the soldiers, the dust, the sky. All that remained was the body in his arms. Patroclus’ head rested against his chest, the arrow still lodged in his heart like a cruel punctuation mark.

Achilles’ hands trembled as he touched Patroclus’ cheek.

“Open your eyes,” he whispered. “Please.”

But Patroclus did not move.

His skin was cooling.
His breath was gone.
His lips were parted as if he had died mid-sentence.

Achilles pressed his forehead to Patroclus’, tears falling freely.

“It’s over,” he whispered. “It’s over, it’s over...”

The words tasted like ash.

He felt something inside him tear — not a crack, not a fracture, but a complete, devastating rupture. A breaking so total it left nothing behind but raw, exposed nerve.

He let out a sound no man should ever make — a sound that silenced the battlefield, that made even the gods turn their heads.

A howl of grief.
A howl of love.
A howl of a future stolen.

— Flashback I: The First Touch

The world blurred.

Achilles’ mind fled backward, desperate to escape the present.

He saw Patroclus as he had been years ago — younger, softer, standing barefoot on the beach at Phthia. The waves lapped at their ankles. The sun painted Patroclus' skin gold.

"You're staring," Patroclus had said, smiling shyly.

Achilles had shrugged. "You're beautiful."

Patroclus had laughed — a sound like warm wind. "I'm not."

"You are to me."

Patroclus' cheeks had flushed. Achilles had stepped closer, brushing a strand of hair from his face. Their fingers had touched — a small, electric moment that felt like the beginning of something sacred.

Achilles had kissed him then, gently, as if afraid Patroclus might break.

Patroclus had kissed him back, with a tenderness Achilles had never known.

Achilles clutched Patroclus' body tighter in the present, as if trying to hold onto that memory.

— Menelaos Arrives

Menelaos stood a few paces away, chest heaving, hands stained with Patroclus' blood. He looked smaller than Achilles had ever seen him — not a king, not a warrior, but a man crushed by the weight of his own choices.

"Achilles..." he whispered.

Achilles didn't look up.

Menelaos swallowed hard. "I tried to save him."

Achilles' voice was low, dangerous. "You should have never put him there."

Menelaos flinched.

"I know," he said. "I know. I thought—"

"You didn't think," Achilles spat. "You wanted a symbol. You wanted a spectacle. You wanted Achilles without Achilles."

Menelaos' eyes filled with tears.

"I wanted hope," he whispered. "And I used him to get it."

Achilles finally looked at him.

The fury in his eyes was not mortal.

“You killed him.”

Menelaos’ voice cracked. “Yes.”

The word hung in the air like a confession carved into stone.

“Yes,” Menelaos repeated, louder this time, as if forcing himself to face it. “I killed him. I tempted him. I pushed him. I sent him out there. I heard his scream. I ran to him. I held him as he died. And I will carry that shame until the end of my days.”

Achilles stared at him, breathing hard.

Menelaos bowed his head.

“I am sorry,” he whispered. “Not as a king. As a man.”

— Flashback II: The Night Before War

Achilles’ mind drifted again — not by choice, but by desperation.

He saw Patroclus lying beside him in their tent the night before they sailed to Troy. The air had been warm, thick with the scent of oil and sea salt. Patroclus had traced patterns on Achilles’ chest with gentle fingers.

“Are you afraid?” Patroclus had asked.

Achilles had smiled. “Of war? Never.”

Patroclus had shaken his head. “Not of war. Of losing yourself.”

Achilles had turned to him, cupping his face. “I won’t lose myself.”

Patroclus had kissed him softly. “Promise me.”

Achilles had whispered against his lips, “I promise.”

In the present, Achilles let out a broken sob.

“I lied,” he whispered into Patroclus’ hair. “I lost myself the moment you fell.”

— The Confrontation

Achilles rose slowly, still holding Patroclus in his arms. His movements were deliberate, ritualistic, as if he were performing a sacred rite.

Menelaos stepped back instinctively.

Achilles’ voice was quiet — too quiet.

“You will leave me now.”

Menelaos nodded, tears streaking his face. “I will.”

“You will not speak of this to anyone.”

“I won’t.”

“You will not come near him again.”

Menelaos’ voice broke. “I understand.”

Achilles’ gaze hardened.

“You will live with what you’ve done.”

Menelaos closed his eyes. “I already do.”

Achilles turned away, cradling Patroclus as if he were carrying a newborn child instead of a fallen lover.

Menelaos watched him go, shoulders shaking, shame burning through him like fever.

He had wanted to be a king remembered for victory.

Instead, he would be remembered — if at all — as the man whose ambition killed Patroclus.

Flashback III: The Dance

Achilles’ mind slipped again, seeking refuge in the past.

He saw Patroclus dancing.

It had been during a festival in Phthia — music playing, torches flickering, wine flowing. Patroclus had been pulled into the circle by laughing villagers, and Achilles had watched, transfixed.

Patroclus had moved with a grace Achilles had never seen — not the grace of a warrior, but of a man completely at ease in his own skin. His smile had been radiant. His laughter had been contagious.

Achilles had joined him, taking his hand, spinning him beneath the torchlight.

“You’re terrible at dancing,” Patroclus had teased.

Achilles had grinned. “Then teach me.”

Patroclus had leaned in, whispering, “I teach you everything.”

Achilles had kissed him then, in front of everyone, not caring who saw.

In the present, Achilles pressed his lips to Patroclus' forehead.

"You taught me how to love," he whispered. "And now I must learn how to live without you."

Achilles carried Patroclus toward the Greek camp, each step heavy with grief. Soldiers parted in silence, heads bowed. Even the wind seemed to hold its breath.

Behind him, Menelaos remained frozen, staring at his blood-stained hands.

He had confessed.

He had admitted his betrayal.

But nothing could undo what he had done.

Achilles did not look back.

He walked toward the pyre that had not yet been built, toward the vengeance that had not yet been unleashed, toward the destiny that had always been waiting for him.

And the gods watched, knowing that the greatest wrath ever witnessed was about to be born — not from pride, not from insult, but from love.

The Vigil, the Pyre, and the Weight of Love

— The Tent of the Dead

Achilles laid Patroclus on the bed they had shared.

Not the battlefield.

Not the dust.

Not the cold earth.

But their bed — the one where they had whispered secrets, argued softly in the dark, kissed until dawn, and held each other through storms both real and imagined.

He arranged Patroclus' limbs with trembling hands, smoothing the hair from his forehead, wiping the blood from his lips. The arrow had been removed, but the wound remained — a small, perfect hole in the chest, rimmed with dried blood.

Achilles stared at it.

A single arrow.

A single moment.

A single choice.

He touched the wound with the gentleness of a lover.

“You should not have died,” he whispered. “Not like this. Not for me.”

His voice cracked.

“Not alone.”

He bowed his head, pressing his forehead to Patroclus’ chest, as if trying to hear a heartbeat that would never return.

— Menelaos at the Threshold

Menelaos stood outside the tent.

He did not enter.

He did not speak.

He did not breathe.

He simply stood there, hands stained with Patroclus’ blood, staring at the flap of the tent as if it were the gate to the underworld.

He had carried Patroclus here.

He had felt the life leave him.

He had seen Achilles’ face when he arrived.

And now he could not move.

Odysseus approached quietly.

“Menelaos,” he said. “You should rest.”

Menelaos shook his head. “I cannot.”

“You cannot undo it either.”

Menelaos closed his eyes. “I know.”

Odysseus studied him — the king who had once been proud, commanding, unshakeable — now hollowed out, a man carved from regret.

“You must speak to Achilles,” Odysseus said.

Menelaos’ voice was barely a whisper. “He will kill me.”

“Perhaps,” Odysseus said. “But he deserves the truth.”

Menelaos swallowed hard. “I gave him the truth,” he said. “And he looked at me as if I were already dead.”

PART IV — Flashback IV: The River

Inside the tent, Achilles’ mind drifted again.

He saw Patroclus laughing in the river near Phthia, splashing water at him with reckless joy. Achilles had pretended to be annoyed, but he had secretly loved it — the way Patroclus’ eyes sparkled, the way his hair clung to his face, the way his smile made the world feel less cruel.

“Come in,” Patroclus had called.

“I don’t want to get wet.”

“You’re already wet,” Patroclus teased. “You swam earlier.”

“That was different.”

“How?”

Achilles had smirked. “I was alone.”

Patroclus had splashed him again. “Coward.”

Achilles had charged into the water, grabbing Patroclus around the waist, lifting him, spinning him, both of them laughing until they couldn’t breathe.

Achilles remembered the warmth of Patroclus’ skin.

The softness of his lips.

The way he whispered, “I love you,” as if it were a secret meant only for the river to hear.

Achilles’ tears fell onto Patroclus’ still chest.

“I should have protected you,” he whispered. “I should have been there.”

— The Washing of the Body

Achilles lit a small lamp and placed it beside the bed.

He filled a basin with warm water.

He dipped a cloth into it.

He began to wash Patroclus’ body.

Slowly.

Tenderly.

Reverently.

He washed the dust from Patroclus' legs.
The blood from his chest.
The dirt from his hands.

He washed him as if preparing him for sleep, not death.

He whispered to him as he worked.

“Do you remember the night we left Phthia?”
“Do you remember the first time you held my hand?”
“Do you remember how you laughed when I tried to braid your hair?”

His voice trembled.

“Do you remember how you loved me?”

He paused, cloth dripping.

“I remember,” he whispered. “I remember everything.”

He washed Patroclus' face last, tracing the familiar lines — the curve of his jaw, the softness of his lips, the gentle slope of his nose.

He kissed his forehead.

“You were the best part of me.”

— Menelaos Enters

Achilles heard footsteps.

He did not turn.

Menelaos stepped inside the tent, head bowed, hands clasped in front of him like a penitent before a god.

“Achilles,” he said softly.

Achilles did not respond.

Menelaos swallowed. “I came to—”

“To what?” Achilles asked, voice low. “To apologize? To explain? To justify?”

Menelaos' voice cracked. “To confess.”

Achilles turned slowly.

His eyes were red, swollen, burning with a grief so deep it bordered on divine wrath.

Menelaos trembled.

“I killed him,” Menelaos whispered. “Not with my hands. But with my ambition. With my pride. With my need for hope. I used him. I tempted him. I sent him out there. And I heard his scream.”

Achilles stared at him.

Menelaos’ voice broke entirely.

“I am sorry,” he whispered. “I am so, so sorry.”

Achilles rose.

He walked toward Menelaos with a calmness that was more terrifying than rage.

Menelaos did not move.

Achilles stopped inches from him.

“You will live,” Achilles said quietly. “Not because I forgive you. But because your guilt is a punishment the gods themselves could not have crafted better.”

Menelaos’ knees buckled.

Achilles turned away.

— The Pyre Begins

Achilles stepped outside the tent, lifting Patroclus in his arms.

The camp fell silent.

Men stopped sharpening their spears.

Horses stopped stamping.

Even the wind seemed to hold its breath.

Achilles carried Patroclus to the center of the camp, where a pyre was being built — wood stacked high, fragrant oils prepared, garlands laid out.

He laid Patroclus on a linen sheet.

He placed coins on his eyes.

He braided his hair.

He wrapped him in a cloak — not Achilles’ cloak, but Patroclus’ own, the one he had worn on cold nights.

He touched his cheek one last time.

“You will not cross the river alone,” Achilles whispered. “I will follow.”

The soldiers exchanged uneasy glances.

They knew what that meant.

Achilles was preparing for death — not today, not tomorrow, but soon.

His fate was sealed.

Achilles stood beside the pyre, hands clenched, jaw set.

He was no longer the man who had refused to fight.

He was no longer the man who had sulked in his tent.

He was no longer the man who believed he could outwit fate.

He was something else now.

Something the world had never seen before.

Behind him, Menelaos watched — hollow, broken, consumed by shame.

Before him, Patroclus lay in peaceful stillness.

Above him, the gods watched, knowing that the storm was about to break.

And Achilles whispered, voice trembling with love and fury:

“Tomorrow, I will burn the world.”

The Wrath, the Farewell, and the Ashes of Love

— The Night Before the Pyre

The camp did not sleep.

Not because of fear.

Not because of the Trojans.

But because Achilles did not sleep — and when Achilles did not sleep, the world held its breath.

He sat beside Patroclus' body, legs folded, hands resting on his knees. The lamp beside him flickered, casting long shadows across the tent. The air was thick with the scent of oil, linen, and grief.

Patroclus lay wrapped in his cloak, hair braided, eyes closed beneath the coins that would guide him across the river. Achilles had washed him, dressed him, tended to him with the devotion of a lover and the reverence of a priest.

Now he simply watched.

Every so often, he reached out and touched Patroclus' hand — as if checking whether warmth might return.

It never did.

Outside, soldiers whispered.

“He hasn't moved in hours.”

“He hasn't eaten.”

“He hasn't spoken.”

“He hasn't cried since the battlefield.”

But they were wrong.

Achilles was crying now — silently, endlessly, tears slipping down his cheeks like a river that refused to dry.

— Menelaos Returns

Menelaos approached the tent again.

He had not slept either.

He had not washed.

He had not spoken to anyone.

He stood at the entrance, trembling.

“Achilles,” he said softly.

Achilles did not look up.

Menelaos swallowed. “I... I want to help prepare the pyre.”

Achilles' voice was quiet, but sharp as a blade.

“You will not touch him.”

Menelaos flinched. “I understand.”

Achilles finally turned his head.

His eyes were hollow, rimmed with red, but burning with something ancient.

“You will watch,” Achilles said. “You will stand with the others. You will see what your choices have done. That is your place.”

Menelaos bowed his head.

“I will do as you say.”

Achilles turned back to Patroclus.

Menelaos stepped away, tears slipping down his face.

He had been a king.

He had been a warrior.

He had been a brother.

But now he was only a man who had destroyed something sacred.

Flashback -- The Promise

Achilles' mind drifted again — not to escape, but because grief had loosened the boundaries between past and present.

He saw Patroclus lying beside him on a warm summer night, stars scattered across the sky like spilled salt. They had been young then — younger than they realized, younger than they would ever be again.

“Achilles,” Patroclus had whispered, tracing circles on his chest. “If I die before you...”

“You won't.”

“But if I do.”

Achilles had frowned. “Why speak of death?”

“Because we are mortal,” Patroclus said softly. “Even you.”

Achilles had kissed his forehead. “If you die, I will follow.”

Patroclus had smiled sadly. “No. You must live. You must be remembered.”

Achilles had shaken his head. “I do not want to be remembered. I want you.”

Patroclus had touched his cheek. “Then promise me something.”

“Anything.”

“When I die — and I will, someday — promise me you will not let me cross the river alone.”

Achilles had held him close.

“I promise.”

In the present, Achilles whispered into Patroclus’ hair:

“I am keeping my promise.

— The Pyre

At dawn, the pyre was ready.

It rose like a mountain of wood and oil, garlands woven through the beams, offerings placed at its base — figs, olives, wine, honey, and the small carved lion Patroclus had kept since childhood.

Achilles carried Patroclus in his arms.

The soldiers parted in silence.

Even the wind seemed to hush.

Achilles climbed the steps of the pyre, each one heavier than the last. He laid Patroclus gently on the wood, arranging his limbs with the same tenderness he had shown in life.

He placed Patroclus’ hands over his chest.

He kissed his forehead.

He whispered something no one else could hear.

Then he stepped back.

Menelaos watched from below, tears streaming down his face.

Odysseus bowed his head.

Ajax clenched his fists.

Agamemnon looked away.

Achilles lifted a torch.

The flame flickered, hungry.

He spoke — not loudly, but with a clarity that carried across the camp.

“Patroclus, beloved of my soul, I send you to the river. But you will not cross alone. I will follow. Not today. Not tomorrow. But soon.”

He lowered the torch.

The pyre ignited.

Flames roared upward, devouring the wood, the garlands, the offerings — and then, gently, reverently, they embraced Patroclus.

Achilles fell to his knees.

— The Wrath

When the pyre burned low, Achilles rose.

He was not the same man.

His grief had hardened into something sharp.
His love had become a weapon.
His sorrow had become destiny.

He walked through the camp, barefoot, ash clinging to his skin. Soldiers stepped aside, fear etched into their faces.

Menelaos approached him cautiously.

“Achilles,” he whispered. “What will you do?”

Achilles looked at him.

His eyes were no longer hollow.
They were fire.

“I will kill Hektor.”

Menelaos swallowed. “And after?”

Achilles’ voice was quiet.

“After, I will die.”

Menelaos’ breath caught. “Achilles—”

“It is the price,” Achilles said. “The gods have made it clear. My life for his. My death for his memory.”

Menelaos shook his head. “There must be another way.”

“There is not.”

Achilles stepped closer.

“You took Patroclus from me. But you will not take my fate.”

Menelaos bowed his head.

“I will not stand in your way.”

Achilles nodded once.

Then he walked toward the battlefield.

— Flashback VI: The Last Morning

Achilles’ mind drifted one final time.

He saw Patroclus waking beside him, sunlight spilling across the bed. Patroclus had stretched, smiled, and whispered:

“Another day.”

Achilles had kissed him. “Another day with you.”

Patroclus had laughed softly. “You make it sound like a blessing.”

“It is.”

Patroclus had touched his cheek. “Then promise me something.”

“Again?”

“One last thing.”

Achilles had smiled. “What is it?”

“When I am gone... remember me kindly.”

Achilles had frowned. “I will remember you fiercely.”

Patroclus had kissed him. “That is enough.”

In the present, Achilles whispered:

“It was never enough.”

— The End

Achilles stood at the edge of the battlefield, the wind tugging at his hair, the ash of Patroclus' pyre still clinging to his skin.

Behind him, the Greeks watched.
Before him, Troy waited.
Above him, the gods leaned in.

He lifted his spear.

“For Patroclus,” he whispered.

And the world trembled.

Ruud van Straten 2026.