

Every Night is Movie Night When You're Dead

By Ian Rory

Across the fields of Asphodel, where dwell the countless dead, the fathomless multitudes whose brief time on Earth has ended and whom Eternity has taken into her welcoming arms, there are some who seek ways to observe those still living, as if seeking some faint memory of the warm blood that once flowed through their veins, and the hearts that once beat so proudly in their chests. With endless time comes infinite patience, and the shades of the dead have cultivated many ways to let their gazes linger upon the lives of the living.

Honestly, figuring out how to get Netflix down there was a big help.

On a rocky outcrop overlooking the great river Lethe, there sat Achilles. Most beloved of all the Myrmidons, he who stood above all others in glorious deeds and who was the mightiest of all those from that age of heroes. Beside him was Patroclus, a valiant-hearted prince amongst men. Their deeds and deaths in the struggle for the great city of Troy ring out across the ages, a song that has been sung a thousand ways by a thousand bards.

All songs change over time in their telling, some more dramatically than others. The two of them sat there together, watching as one of the tellings unfolded before them. Achilles' brow was furrowed, and his expression pensive.

"It's not that I'm not flattered," he began slowly, thoughtfully, "Brad Pitt is very, very hot. No complaints here about him playing me. But this is....not what happened. Like, at all."

"I think Brad's doing his best with what he's been given." Patroclus put his arm around his lover to reassure him. He knew that, even in death, Achilles could get rather...passionate about a subject once he got started.

"Sure, but what has he been given? Are they sure this is Troy? Are they sure that's the story they wanted to tell? Because I seem to recall it being a bit different from this."

"An artist may alter the details of the thing, so long as the truth of the thing remains." Patroclus philosophised as he idly brushed a lock of hair out of Achilles' face.

"Does the truth remain in this telling?" Achilles pouted, a pout that still melted Patroclus' heart after all this time. "I was there, beloved. We both were. You and I alike felt the heat of the Trojan sun blaze down upon us while we waded through the slaughtered sons of Ilium. You and I alike made wives into widows and made mothers mourn boys buried before their time. We saw spoils and conquest, gained glory in the bloody churn of war, lived and loved and died for one another."

He paused for a moment, deep in thought, trying to find more words to put to their deeds. “I punched a river that one time.”

“Yes, I saw that.” Patroclus patted his love on the head. “It was very manly.”

They continued to watch the movie, Patroclus’ arms wrapped around his younger paramour, Achilles resting his head against him while letting out the occasional ‘tch!’ sound when a scene irked him. It was a hobby of theirs, seeing all the different ways they and the other kings and heroes of their age had come to have their stories told. Each generation taking something from the myths and making it their own, each one finding some new truth in-

“Okay, but here’s what I don’t get.” Achilles began again, “Where are all the gods?”

“Where’s the streetwise Hercules...” Patroclus sang, grinning, “to fight the rising odds?”

“Babe, you know what I mean. They were there! The gods were all over the place in the war! You couldn’t *move* without a god turning up to start something with you some days!”

“I remember.” Patroclus nodded. War was the gods’ sport of choice – though he understood that they rush the field far less often these days than when he was alive.

“Remember Diomedes? He wounded Ares AND Aphrodite in the space of about ten minutes! Two gods! If you land some blows on two literal gods, you deserve respect in my book!”

“I remember Diomedes.” Achilles and Patroclus looked up from the sofa to see from where the third voice had joined the conversation. From the mists, a shade approached: Briseis, dark haired and keen-eyed.

“I don’t remember *you* being quite so babyfaced though, Pat.” she smiled teasingly as she beheld their entertainment.

“I knowww.” Patroclus sighed to himself. “Gods, was I ever that young?”

“Not when I knew you.” Achilles chimed in. “You’ve always been bearded and full-grown, strong and wise and all devilish and handsome.”

“Kind, as well.” Briseis joined them on the sofa, kissing Patroclus’ cheek they shuffled up to make room for her. “Out of all the kings and heroes I met, I always liked the ones who were the kindest best.”

“Stop it, I’m blushing.” Patroclus readjusted himself so that Achilles could rest comfortably against him while the three of them talked. “How’s the family?”

“Ugh, honestly, the way my father still acts surprised that his knees don’t bother him any more now he’s a shade, you’d think he’d died yesterday.”

From across the protective barrier of his boyfriend, Achilles looked at the ghost of Briseis. Her presence always brought conflicting emotions to him. He killed her father. He killed her brothers. He sacked her city and took in her shackles as a slave, a prize for himself.

But he had loved her, in his own way. His way mostly involved killing – a poor method of courtship. But Achilles’ time in Asphodel had given him time to think – never his strong suit, he’d admit, but still. And time enough for him to think, one day, became time enough for them to talk, actually talk, and even for him to listen, and to understand. Since then, she’d sometimes joined him and Patroclus for their movie nights, and had actually recommended quite a few paintings and poems about their era to them. Come to think of it...

“Who was that painter,” he asked Patroclus, “the French one, did that portrait of you a while back?”

“Can you be more specific?”

“You know the one I mean! He did a bunch of classical stuff: Jack? Jack David?”

“*Jacques*, babes. Jacques-Louis David.” Patroclus corrected him.

“Yes, him! He did that one of you sitting on some red drapes. See, now *that* was art. More Troy stuff like that please.”

Now it was Patroclus’ turn to pout. “I don’t like that one. I’m completely turned away from the viewer, you can’t even see my face.”

“You can see everything else though.” Even as a mere shade, the blush on Achilles’ face shone pale pink as he envisioned the painting in his head, grinning at his love. “You’re all *muscular* and *brooding*.”

“I got a print of it for my room.” Briseis chimed in.

“Wait, really?!?” Achilles eyes lit up. “Where from? Can you get me a copy? We’ve been looking for something for our living room.”

“No. Absolutely not. *Forbidden*.” But even Patroclus couldn’t help but smile as he was teased mercilessly from two sides by the younger pair.

They watched the rest of the movie, interrupted only by Achilles’ occasional gripes (“That’s not even how he died!” “I know.” “His wife stabbed him!” “I know.”). After it ended, Patroclus told Briseis they were planning to watch another one, and asked if she wanted to stay, but she declined.

“I’ve got plans with Penny later.” she told them. Penthesilea, warrior queen, ruler of the Amazons, had long been together with Briseis since the day she crossed the Styx. Achilles found that the two of them complimented each other well. Plus, Penthesilea could do handstand push-ups, which even he had to admit was *crazy* hot and which caused Briseis to get extremely flustered every time Penny busted them out.

Briseis wished them well and went on her way, Patroclus sending his love to her family on the way out. “So that was *Troy!*” he said after she’d left, clapping his hands together as if in summation.

“That was *something*, I don’t know if it was Troy.” Achilles’ snarked. Patroclus rejoined him on the sofa, his hand idly playing with the young man’s hair again.

“The story of Achilles.” he went on, wrapping one arm back around his boyfriend’s waist, hugging him close, while the other continued to toy with his hair. “Best and most loved of the Greeks.”

“And of his cousin,” they both laughed at that one, as Achilles pressed himself ever closer. “Patroclus. Best and most loved of Achilles.”

Patroclus smiled, and drew Achilles into a kiss, and the two of them forgot to watch a second movie entirely. There would be time later: the one advantage that the dead hold over the living is that they, finally, have enough time.