

Achilles from *The Iliad*, by Homer – To Agamemnon

Dear Agamemnon,

Your life was cursed with an unfaithful wife.

You died neither in peace nor in the glory of war.

My death was mourned above all others,

The greatest glory given to me.

Yet death has drawn life from me,

Ripped it from me long before my last breath.

Life began when I first met man's greatest wonder: War.

I found life in every life I extinguished.

In every heart I plunged a sword.

In every man I brought to his knees.

When Hector shrouded Patroclus' eyes with darkness,

Death came upon me

In interminable waves of sorrow unknown to me before.

In vengeance I cut Hector down,

Yet no life could be found.

The old man of Troy,

He brought me down, begging for Hector's cold corpse.

Tears of sorrow flowed from my eyes.

Not for Patroclus nor Hector,

But for the father who died as I did.

So the aging father brought his son home,

Alone. I no longer felt the joy of war.

Nor do I happily recall memories of war.

I wonder:

How many husbands, fathers, brothers, sons have I torn the life from?

And how many lives have I truly ended?