

68B. COMMEMORATION: TO ALLIUS



can't conceal, goddesses, the things of mine

Allius [p. 197] helped with, or how many services he's performed,

lest fleeting time in forgetful ages

hides this kindness of his in blind night:

but I tell it to you: speak to many future thousands

and let this paper speak in its old age,

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and let the dead become more and more famous,

don't let the spider spinning its fine web on high

perform its task on *Allius's* neglected name.

For you know how fickle *Venus* [p. 197] would have troubled me,

and in what way she might have scorched me,

when I might have burned like the *Sicilian* [p. 236] rocks,

or the waters of Malis at *Oetaean Thermopylae* [p. 235],

my grieving eyes not have ceased to melt with endless tears,

my cheeks to have been drenched with a saddened rain.

Then like a mountain stream shining on airy heights,

springing from mossy rock, that, having fallen

headlong from sloping valleys, passes

through the midst of densely populated regions,

sweet comfort to travellers' weary labour,

when fierce heat splits the dried-up fields:
 like to a favourable wind that comes breathing lightly
 to the sailor tossed in the black tempest,
 now praying to *Pollux* [p. 227], now imploring *Castor* [p. 205],
 such was Allius's help to me.

He opened the closed field with a wide path,
 and granted my self and my girl a house,
 where we carried on our mutual affair,
 to which my bright goddess repaired
 with gentle steps, set her graceful sandals
 on the worn threshold, rested her shining feet,
 as once with blazing passion *Laodamia* [p. 217] came
 to the house, begun in vain, of *Protesilaus* [p. 229]
 her husband, the sacrifice not yet appeasing
 the gods' love of sacred blood.

Let nothing please me much, Fate, *Ramnusian* [p. 230] Virgin,
 that you by chance may receive unwillingly.

Laodamia learnt from the loss of her husband
 how the hungry altar desires holy blood:
 she was forced to loose her new spouse's neck,
 before one winter, and another returning,
 had sated eager love with their long nights,
 so she might learn to live without a lost husband,
 whom the *Fates* [p. 223] knew would not live long
 if he went as a soldier to the walls of *Troy* [p. 236].

For now *Helen's* [p. 213] abduction had forced
 the *Greek* [p. 199] nobles to rouse their men for Troy,
 Troy (the evil!) a common grave for Asia and Europe,

Troy the bitter ruin of men and of all virtue,
have you not even brought my brother's death.
Oh alas for the brother taken from me,
oh alas the shining light of a brother lost,
with you our whole house is buried together,
with you all our joys perish in one,
that your love nourished in sweet life.
You who, far away, are not interred among famous tombs,
nor near the ashes of the known,
but vile Troy, unhappy Troy, holds your grave,
in the furthest soil of an alien land.
To which they say the men of Greece hurried
from every side, deserting their household shrines,
lest *Paris* [p. 223], delighted, carried off at leisure,
to a peaceful bed, the adulteress he'd abducted.
Through your misfortune, then, loveliest Laodamia
your husband was taken from you, dearer to you
than life and spirit: love's passion, swallowing you
in a whirlpool, carried you into the steep abyss,
as they say the soil of Greek *Pheneus* [p. 238] near *Cyllene* [p. 209]
dried up, when the thick swamp was drained,
that *Hercules* [p. 214], the divinely-fathered, once dared to lance,
in the hacked out marrow of the mountains,
when his sure arrows struck the *Stymphalian* [p. 233] birds,
at a worse master's command, so that the threshold
of the heavens might be frequented by more gods,
and *Hebe* [p. 213] might not long remain a virgin.
But your deep love, that taught an untamed girl

to bear the yoke, was deeper still than that abyss.
 Since the grandchild nursed by an only daughter,
 is not as dear to her father, child of his old age,
 that, when the child's name is barely entered
 in the grandfather's will, disposing of his riches,
 removing the scornful family's impious joy,
 scatters the vultures from his white head:
 no spouse was ever as pleasing to a white dove,
 that they say often sinfully gives far more kisses
 nipping with its beak, than any woman
 who beyond measure longs for as much.
 But you alone outdo their great passion,
 you who are won for ever by a golden-haired man.
 You to whom the light of my life conceded little
 or nothing in worth, when she gave herself
 into my lap, who often shone, with *Cupid* ^[p. 208]
 running about her, bright in his saffron tunic.
 Even if she's still not content with Catullus alone,
 I'll suffer the infrequent affairs of a shy mistress,
 lest I'm too annoying in the manner of fools.
 Often even *Juno* ^[p. 216], greatest of goddesses,
 swallows her burning anger with her spouse's sins,
 knowing the many affairs of all-willing *Jupiter* ^[p. 216].
 And men are not to be compared with the gods,

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bear the thankless burden of a worried father.
Yet, led by no father's hand, she comes to me,
to the house, fragrant with Assyrian perfumes,
brings me the marvellous gift in the secret night,
she herself, stolen away from her husband's breast.
And that is enough, if that alone's granted to me,
that she marks out that day with a brighter light.
This then Allius, for you, what I can, a gift
made of song, in return for your friendship,
lest this day and that, and others on others
touch your name with corrosions of rust.
And let the gods add more to this, those gifts
Themis [p. 234] once used to bring to the pious of old.
May you be happy, both you and your life,
both your house in which we joyed, and the lady,
and he who first gave you to me,
from which source all our good was born, and she,
before everything, dearer to me than him, light of my life,
through whose being alive, living is sweet to me.



'Paris Being Admitted to the Bedchamber of Helen'
Jacob de Backer (Dutch, 1555 - 1585)
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