

Where is my dowry, you ask? That field is my dowry,
 the one you had to plow before taking the fleece. 200
 The golden ram, a sight to behold, now *that* is my dowry,
 and if I asked for its return, you would say no.
 My dowry is you and your safety, is the youth of your Greek comrades.
 Compare this to your Sisyphian wealth, cruel man.
 That you live, that you have a wife and a father-in-law with power,
 that you even have the luxury of thanklessness: mine.
 Which I will . . . but no, why should I tell you your punishment?
 My rage is pregnant with powerful threats.
 Wherever my rage takes me, I will follow! Perhaps I will regret my
 actions—
 but I regret now that I helped a faithless man. 210

God will have to look on, God who sets my heart churning.
 Surely something greater moves my mind.

HEROIDES XIII: LAODAMIA TO PROTESILAUS

Laodamia writes to her husband, Protesilaus, after he has left their home to fight at Troy. He will end up being the first to reach the Trojan shore and the first to die.

Haemonian Laodamia sends to her Haemonian husband
 loving greetings, and hopes they go where they're sent.
 Word is that the wind kept you holed up at Aulis,
 but where was that wind when you deserted me?
 That's when the water should have resisted your oars,
 high time then for a raging stormwind.
 I could have given my man more kisses, pled with him more—
 and there was a lot I wanted to say to you then.
 But poof, you were gone, and the wind that whisked you away
 was one that your sailors prayed for, not I, 10
 a wind suited to seafarers, but not to a lover.
 I had to leave your embrace, Protesilaus,
 my tongue had to leave unsaid all that I wanted to say,
 and I barely had time for a sad, last goodbye.

No sooner had Boreas swooshed down and billowed your sails
 than my Protesilaus was far away.
 While I could still see my husband, seeing was all my joy,
 and I kept my eyes fixed on your own.
 When you faded from sight, I could still see the sails,
 and those sails detained my eyes a long time. 20
 When I could no longer see you or your receding sails
 and what I could see was only the water,
 the light disappeared along with you, the world turned dark,
 and I'm told I sank bloodless onto the ground.
 Your father, Iphiclus, mine, old Acastus, and my grief-stricken mother
 could scarcely revive me with splashing cold water.
 They did their duty, but it didn't really help me.
 Wretched as I was, I should have had the right to die.

When my senses returned, my pain returned as well,
 my chaste heart tormented by love for you. 30
 I no longer care if my hair is combed or styled,
 and golden robes no longer delight.
 Like those touched by horned Bacchus's vine-leafed rod
 I wander wherever my frenzy takes me.
 Phylace's matrons gather around me and cry
 "Don your royal robes, Laodamia!"
 So should I go around in fine woolens dyed purple
 while my husband fights under Ilion's walls?
 Put up my hair while his is pressed by a helmet?
 Wear new clothes while he is in armor? 40
 I will imitate your toil as best I can, dressed in rags,
 and live in gloom during this time of war.
 As for you, Paris, Priam's ruinous pretty boy, may you be
 as hapless a foe as you were a treacherous guest!
 If only you had disliked Taenarian Helen's face,
 or if she hadn't been so taken by yours!
 And you, Menelaus, too much put out by that theft,
 how many tears will your revenge cause!
 Ward off this omen from us, O gods. Allow my husband
 to dedicate his arms to Jove of Safe Returns! 50
 But I panic whenever I think of this wretched war,
 and my tears flow like snow that melts in the sun.
 Ilion, Tenedos, Simois, Xanthus, and Ida
 are names whose very sound makes me tremble.
 Nor would the interloper have dared the abduction
 had he not known he could defend himself.
 They say he arrived decked out in gold,
 wearing the wealth of Phrygia,
 with a powerful fleet and men at arms as well—
 who knows the extent of his soldiery? 60
 I suspect this is how you were won over, Helen,
 this is what is causing the Greeks such woe.

[two spurious lines omitted]

And if you love me, beware of Hector, whoever he is, 65
 and keep his name stamped in your memory.
 When you have avoided him avoid others as well,
 think that there are many Hectors at Troy.
 And remember to say as you prepare for battle,
 "Laodamia told me to spare her pain." 70
 If Troy is fated to fall to the Argive army,
 it will fall without you taking a wound.
 Let Menelaus fight, let him meet the enemy:
 It's up to the husband to rescue his wife.

[two spurious lines omitted]

Your cause is different. Just fight to stay alive 77
 and return to the faithful embrace of your queen.

Out of many enemies spare one, O Dardanians,
 lest out of his body my own blood flow. 80
 He is not one to fight with bare steel in the press of battle,
 to bull himself through enemy lines.
 His prowess is far greater in love than in warfare.
 Let others fight; let Protesilaus love.

I now admit that I wanted to call you back. I struggled,
 but for fear of evil omen, bit my tongue.
 And when you were leaving your father's home and stumbled
 right at the threshold—a bad omen for sure—
 I groaned at the sight, and in my heart of hearts I said,
 "May this be an omen of my lord's return." 90
 I tell you this now so you won't be over-brave in warfare.
 Make this fear of mine vanish in the wind.

And there is a prophecy that dooms unfairly
 the first of the Greeks to touch Trojan soil.
 Unhappy the woman who first laments her lost husband!
 May the gods prevent you from being too bold.
 Of the thousand ships let yours be the thousandth,
 the last to cross all those wearied waves!

I'll give you this warning: be sure to disembark last.
 You're not sailing to your father's homeland. 100
 When you do come back, speed on with sail and oars both,
 relaxing only when you're on your own shore.

Whether Phoebus is hidden, or risen high above earth,
 come to me by day, come to me at night,
 but more by night than by day: night is welcome to women
 whose heads are pillowed on a lover's arm.
 In my chaste bed I can only sleep with mendacious dreams.
 Lacking true joys I must make do with false.
 But why does your pale image appear before me,
 a slew of complaints falling from your lips? 110
 I shake off slumber and pray to night's apparitions.
 Not an altar in Thessaly lacks sacrifice from me.
 When I let my tears fall on the offered incense, the flame
 flares and dies as if it were quenched with wine.
 When will I hold you, back safe and sound, in an eager embrace,
 and languish in delightful ecstasy?
 When will I be next to you on the same couch, listening
 to your account of your glorious deeds?
 And while you are telling me, delightful as it will be,
 you will kiss and be kissed to both our delight. 120
 Well-told tales often have such interruptions,
 delightful delays refreshing the tongue.

But when Troy comes to mind, so do the wind and the water,
 and good hope is overwhelmed by anxiety.
 And then there's this: the winds prevent you from setting sail,
 and yet you prepare to launch despite heavy seas.
 Who would be willing to sail home with the wind against him?
 And yet you're sailing *from* home against the wind?
 Neptune will never open a route to his own city.
 Where are you charging off to? Just get yourselves home! 130
 Where are you charging off to, Danaans? Listen to the winds!
 This delay isn't just bad luck: it's divinely ordained!

What is your quest in this epic war but an adulteress?
 Reverse your sails while you can, Argive marines!
 But what am I doing, calling you back? I don't want to jinx it!
 May gentle gales swoosh over a peaceful sea.

I do envy the Trojan women, even though they foresee
 their lovers' tearful fates, with the enemy so close.
 A newly wed bride will set the helmet on her brave husband's head
 and put into his hands his Dardanian arms, 140
 and while she gives him his arms she will receive his kisses—
 a kind of ceremony sweet to both—
 and leading her man forth will give him this injunction:
 "Be sure to bring these weapons back to Jove."
 Bearing in mind his lady's commands, he will battle
 with caution, keeping his home in mind,
 and when he returns safely she will unstrap his helmet
 and take his weary limbs into her arms.

But here we are uncertain, and in our anxiety,
 imagine all has happened that possibly may. 150
 Still, while you are soldiering in a distant country
 I have a waxen image of your face.
 It hears the endearments I whisper to you,
 and it receives my soft caresses.
 Believe me, the image is more than it seems to be;
 if it could speak, it would be Protesilaus.
 I look at it, hold it in place of my actual husband,
 and I complain to it as if it could speak.

By your return, by your bodily self, my lord, I swear,
 and by the torches of our marital love, 160
 I will come to you in whatever way you summon,
 whether it is what I fear or whether you survive.
 My letter closes now with this brief request:
 If you care for me, take care for yourself.