Katherine Philips (1631-1664)

Orinda* upon Little Hector Philips

Twice forty months of wedlock did I stay,*
  Then had my vows crowned with a lovely boy,
And yet in forty days he dropped away,
  O swift vicissitude of human joy.

I did but see him and he disappeared,
  I did but pluck the rosebud and it fell,
A sorrow unforeseen and scarcely feared,
  For ill* can mortals their afflictions spell.

And now, sweet babe, what can my trembling heart
  Suggest to right my doleful* fate or thee?

Tears are my muse and sorrow all my art,
  So piercing groans must be thy elegy.

Thus whilst* no eye is witness of my moan,
  I grieve thy loss, ah boy too dear to live,
And let the unconcernèd world alone,
  Who* neither will, nor can refreshment give.

An off’ring too for thy sad tomb I have,
  Too just* a tribute to thy early hearse;
Receive these gasping numbers to thy grave,
  The last of thy unhappy mother’s verse.

(published 1667)

Note: Philips’s only son, Hector, was born on 23 April 1655. He died nine days later.

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