

## 62. WEDDING SONG



evening is here, young men, arise: evening, awaited  
so long by the heavens, barely still shows the light.  
Now is the time to rise, to leave the rich banquet,  
now the virgin comes, now the wedding-song is sung.

*Hymen* [p. 214] O Hymenaeae, Hymen be near, O Hymenaeae!  
Do you see the unmarried girls, you young men?  
Rise to meet them: the evening star shows Thessalian fire.  
Such is the contest: see how they spring up so nimbly?  
Don't fear to rise, they sing to win a partner.  
Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen be near, O Hymenaeae!  
The palm's not easily won by us men as equals:  
consider, the girls need to prepare amongst themselves.  
not a vain preparation: they truly know what's what:  
no wonder, since they concentrate their whole mind.  
Our minds are elsewhere: our ears turn elsewhere:  
so we'll be defeated by willpower: victory needs attention.  
Therefore turn your minds to it at the least:  
now they begin to sing, now you must reply.  
Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen be near, O Hymenaeae!  
*Hesperus* [p. 237] what fire, they say, is crueller than yours?  
Who can tear a daughter away from her mother's arms,  
from a mother's detaining arms tear a daughter away,  
and give a virgin girl to an ardent young man.  
What do the enemy do that's crueller, in capturing a city?

Hymen O Hymenae, Hymen be near, O Hymenae!  
Hesperus, who shines with happier fire in the sky?  
You who strengthen the bond of marriage with your flame,  
with what men swear, swearing it to the parents,  
not to be joined together before your own brightness rises.  
What wished-for hour by the gods is more happily granted?  
Hymen O Hymenae, Hymen be near, O Hymenae!  
Hesperus has stolen one like us away.

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And now at your rising the watchman always wakes,  
thieves hide by night, who often likewise return,  
Hesperus, you catch them, as your name alters, at dawn,  
but the girls love to slander you with false complaints.  
Why do they complain, if they secretly wish it then?  
Hymen O Hymenae, Hymen be near, O Hymenae!  
As the hidden flower born in the hedged garden  
unknown to the beasts, untouched by the plough,  
that the breezes sweeten, the sun strengthens, the rain feeds:  
that many young men would choose, and many young girls:  
when that same flower fades, plucked by a tender hand,  
no young boy would choose it, and no young girl:  
so the virgin, while she's untouched, while she's their love:  
if she loses her flower of chastity, her body dishonoured,  
she's no longer the boy's delight, the girls' beloved.  
Hymen O Hymenae, Hymen be near, O Hymenae!

As the vine we see, grown in the open field,  
never lifting its head, never bearing sweet grapes,  
its delicate stem bending downwards with the weight,  
so that in a moment its tallest shoot will touch its roots:  
no countryman, no farm-hand will cherish it:  
but if the same plant is fastened tight, wedded to an elm,  
many countrymen and farm-hands will cherish it.  
So a virgin who stays untouched, and uncultivated, ages:  
while taken in equal marriage, while the time is ripe,  
she's loved more by the man, less hateful to her parents.  
Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen be near, O Hymenaeae!  
And don't you struggle with such a husband, girl.  
it's not right to struggle, you, whose father gives you away,  
your father and your mother, who prepare you.  
Your virginity's not wholly yours: part is your parents:  
a third your father's, a third your mother's,  
only a third is yours: don't fight those two,  
who grant their rights to the son-in-law with the dowry.  
Hymen O Hymenaeae, Hymen be near, O Hymenaeae!



'Hymen and Cupid'  
William Hogarth (English, 1697 - 1764)  
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