

Sonnets 1 to 10,  
a free sample from

The Bridegroom Cometh:  
Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*

Modern Language Edition

by

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SONNET 1.

*The poet imagines the pages of his writing in the hands of his beloved, her starlike eyes scanning its lines, drinking in his rhymes.*

HAPPY you leaves, when by those lily hands  
that hold my life with their death-dealing might:  
you'll be fondled and held in love's soft bands,  
like captives trembling at their victor's sight.  
And happy lines, on which with bright starlight,  
those shining eyes will sometimes deign to look  
and read the sorrows of my dying sprite,  
written with tears in my heart's anguished book.  
And happy rhymes, bathed in the mountain brook  
of sacred springs from which she derived is,  
when you behold that angel's blessed look,  
my soul's long wished-for food, my heaven's bliss.  
Leaves, lines, and rhymes made to please her alone,  
who, if you please, for me's the only one.

SONNET 2.

*The poet addresses his own mind and the unsettled thought emerging from it, like the offspring of a snake that will cannibalize its own mother in the act of giving birth.*

YOU restless thought that I at first had bred  
from th'inner suff'ring of my lovelorn heart  
and have since then with sighs and sorrows fed  
till, grown too large, you would that womb depart.  
Break out at last from that deep inner part  
in which you now lurk like a viper's brood,  
and seek consolation to ease my smart  
as well as to sustain yourself with food.  
But if you have my fair one newly viewed  
and chanced to meet, fall humbly at her feet  
and with true meekness and a subdued mood,  
pardon for you, and grace for me, intreat.  
If she grants that, live and my love cherish;  
if not, die and we'll together perish.

SONNET 3.

*The poet is struck by the divine light emanating from his beloved and finds that he can only write his poetic responses in his heart.*

THE sovereign beauty that I do admire,  
shows the world why it deserves to be praised:  
its shining light has kindled heav'nly fire  
in my weak spirit as she it has raised.  
And being now by her huge brightness dazed,  
I can no longer earthly things now view;  
but looking at her still, I stand amazed  
at this great sight of such celestial hue.  
So when my tongue would speak her praises due,  
it is silenced by thought's astonishment;  
and when my pen would write her titles true,  
it is ravished by fancy's wonderment.  
Yet in my heart, I will then speak and write  
the wonder that my mind cannot endite.

SONNET 4.

*The poet stands at the beginning of January,  
anticipating the coming of spring and new love.*

NEW Year, you look out from Janus's gate,  
and seem to promise hope of new delight  
as you nod to Old Year on his last date  
and ask old thoughts to vanish out of sight.

Then calling out from the sad winter night,  
young Love, who'd long slept in this joyless bower,  
shakes him awake and soon sets him upright,  
flashing cruel wings and darts of deadly power.

For lusty spring, now in his fruitful hour,  
is ready to come out, him to receive,  
and warns the Earth with brightly colored flower,  
to deck herself and her fair mantle weave.

Then you fair flower, in whom fresh youth does reign,  
prepare yourself new love to entertain.

SONNET 5.

*The poet defends his beloved's sense of dignity and decorum in the eyes of critics.*

YOU crudely do wrong to my heart's desire,  
by finding fault with her strict sense of pride,  
the thing that I in her do most admire,  
and is by the profane world most envied.

In her proud looks is secretly implied,  
scorn for base things and for foule dishonour;  
judgmental eyes that glance off to the side  
are always hesitant to look at her.

Her pride is praise, her carriage is honour;  
a heightened innocence shows in her eyes:  
and her fair appearance like a banner  
waves in defiance of all enemies.

Nothing so worthwhile has ever been tried  
without a spark of some self-serving pride.

SONNET 6.

*The poet encourages himself not to give in to the short-term misgivings and potentially painful adjustments of marrying a headstrong woman for the benefits of a potentially rich and rewarding lifetime relationship.*

DO not be dismayed that her made-up mind,  
seems to persist in such rebellious pride.  
Such love is not like lust of the base kind:  
the harder won, the more it will abide.  
The hardy oak, whose sap has not yet dried,  
takes time before it ever catches fire;  
but once it starts burning, it does divide  
to release heat, and flames to heav'n aspire.  
It is so hard to kindle new desire,  
in a sweet breast that will last forever;  
deep is the wound that renders us entire  
for our own good, that only death can sever.  
Then do not dwell on what's such a small pain  
to tie a knot that will always remain.

SONNET 7.

*The poet is both attracted and repelled by the secret powers that lie within his beloved's eyes.*

FAIR eyes, the mirror of my amazed heart,  
what wondrous power lies coilèd within you,  
from which you can both life and death let dart  
into the target of your godlike view?  
For when you gently look with loving hue,  
then is my soul by love and life inspired;  
but when you glower, or look at me askew,  
then I do die, as if by lightning fired.  
But since such life is more than death desired,  
stay looking lovely, as becomes you best,  
that your bright glance by my weak eyes admired,  
may kindle living fire within my breast.  
Such life should be the glory of your light;  
such death a sad example of your might.

SONNET 8.

*The poet considers the light in the eyes of his beloved as a gift from God that she can use to bring enlightenment and joy to the whole world.*

**M**ORE than most fair, full of the sacred fire

lit up above, with our Creator near—

not eyes but joys, for which angels conspire,

and nothing else is considered as dear.

Through your bright beams, does not the blinded guest [Cupid]

shoot out his darts and deep emotions wound?

But angels come to lead frail minds to rest

in pure desire, who to heaven are bound.

You frame my thoughts and alter me within;

you guard my tongue and teach my heart to speak;

you calm the storm that passion did begin,

strong from your cause but, next to your strength, weak.

Dark is the world, where your light never shone;

rich is the man who'll watch you from now on.

SONNET 9.

*The poet tries to find a source of light that can compare to the light in his beloved's eyes.*

I searched a long time so I might compare  
those powerful eyes which brighten my dark spright,  
yet there's nothing on earth to which I dare  
to set her likeness with their shining light.  
Not to the sun, for they do shine at night;  
nor to the moon, for they do change never;  
nor to the stars, for they have purer sight;  
nor to a fire, for they don't burn up e'er;  
Nor to lightning, for they still persever';  
nor to di'monds, for they are much softer;  
nor to crystal, for they will not sever;  
nor to glass, for coarse stuff might offend her.  
Then to our Maker they must compared be,  
whose light illuminates all that we see.

SONNET 10.

*The poet tries to enlist the support of Cupid to bring his beloved's haughty demeanour down a few notches.*

IMMORAL Lord of love, what law is this,  
that allows me so tormented to be,  
while she lords all with unrestricted bliss  
in her free will, scorning both you and me?  
See how the dictatrice is glad to see  
the mass exterminations her eyes make,  
and humbles hearts for your captivity  
so you your great vengeance on them can take.  
But do give her proud heart a little shake,  
and that smug look, with which she does control  
all this world's pride, much humbler make,  
and all her faults in your black book enroll.  
Then I may laugh at her on equal term,  
as she laughs at me while in pain I squirm.

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