

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

31 *A Trampwoman's Tragedy*

(182-)

I

From Wynyard's Gap the livelong day,
The livelong day,
We beat afoot the northward way
We had travelled times before.
The sun-blaze burning on our backs, 5
Our shoulders sticking to our packs,
By fosseway, fields, and turnpike tracks
We skirted sad Sedge-Moor.

II

Full twenty miles we jaunted on,
We jaunted on, — 10
My fancy-man, and jeering John,
And Mother Lee, and I.
And, as the sun drew down to west,
We climbed the toilsome Poldon crest,
And saw, of landskip sights the best, 15
The inn that beamed thereby.

III

For months we had padded side by side,
Ay, side by side
Through the Great Forest, Blackmoor wide,
And where the Parret ran. 20
We'd faced the gusts on Mendip ridge,
Had crossed the Yeo unhelped by bridge,
Been stung by every Marshwood midge,
I and my fancy-man.

IV

Lone inns we loved, my man and I, 25
My man and I;
"King's Stag," "Windwhistle" high and dry,

“The Horse” on Hintock Green,
The cosy house at Wynyard’s Gap,
“The Hut” renowned on Bredy Knap, 30
And many another wayside tap
Where folk might sit unseen.

V

Now as we trudged — O deadly day,
O deadly day! —
I teased my fancy-man in play 35
And wanton idleness.
I walked alongside jeering John,
I laid his hand my waist upon;
I would not bend my glances on
My lover’s dark distress. 40

VI

Thus Poldon top at last we won,
At last we won,
And gained the inn at sink of sun
Far-famed as “Marshal’s Elm.”
Beneath us figured tor and lea, 45
From Mendip to the western sea —
I doubt if finer sight there be
Within this royal realm.

VII

Inside the settle all a-row —
All four a-row 50
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee 55
Passed to my former one.

VIII

Then in a voice I had never heard,
I had never heard,
My only Love to me: “One word,
My lady, if you please! 60

Whose is the child you are like to bear? —
His? After all my months o' care?"
God knows 'twas not! But, O despair!
I nodded — still to tease.

IX

Then up he sprung, and with his knife — 65
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny's life,
Yes; there, at set of sun.
The slant ray through the window nigh
Gilded John's blood and glazing eye, 70
Ere scarcely Mother Lee and I
Knew that the deed was done.

X

The taverns tell the gloomy tale,
The gloomy tale, 75
How that at Ivel-chester jail
My Love, my sweetheart swung;
Though stained till now by no misdeed
Save one horse ta'en in time o' need;
(Blue Jimmy stole right many a steed
Ere his last fling he flung.) 80

XI

Thereaft I walked the world alone,
Alone, alone!
On his death-day I gave my groan
And dropt his dead-born child.
'Twas nigh the jail, beneath a tree, 85
None tending me; for Mother Lee
Had died at Glaston, leaving me
Unfriended on the wild.

XII

And in the night as I lay weak,
As I lay weak, 90
The leaves a-falling on my cheek,
The red moon low declined —
The ghost of him I'd die to kiss

Rose up and said: "Ah, tell me this!
Was the child mine, or was it his?
Speak, that I rest may find!" 95

XIII

O doubt not but I told him then,
I told him then,
That I had kept me from all men
Since we joined lips and swore. 100
Whereat he smiled, and thinned away
As the wind stirred to call up day . . .
— 'Tis past! And here alone I stray
Haunting the Western Moor.

1902

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