

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

5 *The Catching Ballet of the Wedding Clothes*

(*Temp. Guliel. IV.*)

“A gentleman’s coming
To court me, they say;
The ringers are told,
And the band is to play.
O why should he do it 5
Now poor Jack’s away?
I surely shall rue it:
Come, white witch, and say!”

“The gentleman’s coming
To marry you, dear; 10
They tell at the turnpikes
That he has been here!
He rode here in secret,
To gain eye of you:—
Throw over the sailor, 15
Is what I should do!”

“I will not throw over
Poor Jack: no, indeed,
For a new unknown lover
Who loves at such speed, 20
And writes to the ringers,
And orders the band,
As if I could only
Obey his command!

“La! now here is something 25
Close packed in a box,
And strapped up and corded,
And held with two locks!”

“Dear, that’s from him, surely,
As we may suppose? 30
Ay, through the chink shining
I spy wedding clothes!”

“Yes—here’s a drawn bonnet,
And tortoiseshell combs,
And a silk gown, silk stockings, 35
And scents of rare blooms;
And shoes, too, of satin,
Quite past all my pride:
O, how will it end, witch;
I can’t be his bride!” 40

“Don’t waste you in weeping:
Not worth it is man!
Beshrew me, my deary,
I’ve shaped a new plan.
Wear the clothes of the rich one, 45
Since he will not see,
But marry the poor one
You love faithfully.”

“Here’s a last packet. . . . Never!
It knocks me to bits— 50
The ring! *‘Just to try on,
To see if it fits.’*

O I cannot!” . . . But Jack said,
Quite cool, when he came,
“Well, it will save money, 55
And be just the same.”

The marriage took place,
Yes; as vowed, she was true
To her dear sailor Jack
Ere the gentleman knew; 60
But she wore the rich clothing,

Much joyed at such guise,
Yet fearing and trembling
With tears in her eyes.

And at midnight, between her 65
And him she had wed,
The gentleman's figure
Arose up and said:
"My too-cruel darling,
In spite of your oaths, 70
You have married the man
Of the ring and the clothes!"

Thence on, would confront her,
When sleep had grown slack,
His face on the pillow 75
Between her and Jack;
And he nightly kept whispering:
"You surely must see,
Though your tongue-tip took him, Love,
Your body took me." 80

Till she sighed: "Yes, my word,
It must be confessed o' me,
Jack has; but this man
Can claim all the rest o' me!
And off to go with him 85
Bewitched am I now:
I'd fain not be two men's,
And won't, anyhow!"

So she pleaded and pleaded 90
From daybreak till dark,
Converting the parish
(Save parson and clerk).
She then wrote to Jack thus:
"I'm torn with mind-strife:

