

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

26 *The Satin Shoes*

“If ever I walk to church to wed,
As other maidens use,
And face the gathered eyes,” she said,
“I’ll go in satin shoes!”

She was as fair as early day 5
Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

The time arrived when it was meet 10
That she should be a bride;
The satin shoes were on her feet,
Her father was at her side.

They stood within the dairy door,
And gazed across the green;
The church loomed on the distant moor, 15
But rain was thick between.

“The grass-path hardly can be stepped,
The lane is like a pool!” —
Her dream is shown to be inept,
Her wish they overrule. 20

“To go forth shod in satin soft
A coach would be required!”
For thickest boots the shoes were doffed —
Those shoes her soul desired. . . .

All day the bride, as overborne, 25
Was seen to brood apart,
And that the shoes had not been worn
Sat heavy on her heart.

From her wrecked dream, as months flew on,
Her thought seemed not to range. 30
“What ails the wife,” they said anon,
“That she should be so strange?” . . .

Ah — what coach comes with furtive glide —
A coach of closed-up kind?
It comes to fetch the last year’s bride, 35
Who wanders in her mind.

She strove with them, and fearfully ran
Stairward with one low scream:
“Nay — coax her,” said the madhouse man,
“With some old household theme.” 40

“If you will go, dear, you must fain
Put on those shoes — the pair
Meant for your marriage, which the rain
Forbade you then to wear.”

She clapped her hands, flushed joyous hues; 45
“O yes — I’ll up and ride
If I am to wear my satin shoes
And be a proper bride!”

Out then her little foot held she,
As to depart with speed; 50
The madhouse man smiled pleasantly
To see the wile succeed.

She turned to him when all was done,
And gave him her thin hand,
Exclaiming like an enraptured one, 55
“This time it will be grand!”

She mounted with a face elate,
Shut was the carriage door;
They drove her to the madhouse gate,
And she was seen no more. . . . 60

Yet she was fair as early day

Shining on meads unmown,
And her sweet syllables seemed to play
Like flute-notes softly blown.

1910

(From *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*.
London: Macmillan, 1930)