“Thy husband — poor, poor Heart! — is dead —
   Dead, out by Moreford Rise:
A bull escaped the barn-shed,
   Gored him, and there he lies!”

— “Ha, ha — go away! ’Tis a tale, methink,
   Thou joker Kit!” laughed she.
“I’ve known thee many a year, Kit Twink,
   And ever hast thou fooled me!”

— “But, Mistress Damon — I can swear
   Thy goodman John is dead!
And soon th’lt hear their feet who bear
   His body to his bed.”

So unwontedly sad was the merry man’s face —
   That face which had long deceived —
That she gazed and gazed: and then could trace
   The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge,
   And scanned far Egdon-side:
And stood: and you heard the wind-swept sedge
   And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

“O my chamber’s untidied, unmade my bed,
   Though the day has begun to wear!
‘What a slovenly hussif!’ it will be said,
   When they all go up my stair!”

She disappeared: and the joker stood
   Depressed by his neighbour’s doom,
And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood
   Thought first of her unkempt room.
But a fortnight thence she could take no food,
   And she pined in a slow decay;
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
   And laughed in his ancient way.

1894

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