

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

33 *The Vampirine Fair*

Gilbert had sailed to India's shore,
And I was all alone:
My lord came in at my open door
And said, "O fairest one!"

He leant upon the slant bureau, 5
And sighed, "I am sick for thee!"
"My Lord," said I, "pray speak not so,
Since wedded wife I be."

Leaning upon the slant bureau, 10
Bitter his next words came:
"So much I know; and likewise know
My love burns on the same!"

"But since you thrust my love away,
And since it knows no cure,
I must live out as best I may 15
The ache that I endure."

When Michaelmas browned the nether Coomb,
And Wingreen Hill above,
And made the hollyhocks rags of bloom,
My lord grew ill of love. 20

My lord grew ill with love for me;
Gilbert was far from port;
And — so it was — that time did see
Me housed at Manor Court.

About the bowers of Manor Court 25
The primrose pushed its head
When, on a day at last, report
Arrived of him I had wed.

“Gilbert, my Lord, is homeward bound,
His sloop is drawing near, 30
What shall I do when I am found
Not in his house but here?”

“O I will heal the injuries
I’ve done to him and thee.
I’ll give him means to live at ease 35
Afar from Shastonb’ry.”

When Gilbert came we both took thought:
“Since comfort and good cheer,”
Said he, “so readily are bought,
He’s welcome to thee, Dear.” 40

So when my lord flung liberally
His gold in Gilbert’s hands,
I coaxed and got my brothers three
Made stewards of his lands.

And then I coaxed him to install 45
My other kith and kin,
With aim to benefit them all
Before his love ran thin.

And next I craved to be possessed
Of plate and jewels rare. 50
He groaned: “You give me, Love, no rest,
Take all the law will spare!”

And so in course of years my wealth
Became a goodly hoard,
My steward brethren, too, by stealth 55
Had each a fortune stored.

Thereafter in the gloom he’d walk,
And by and by began
To say aloud in absent talk,
“I am a ruined man! — 60

“I hardly could have thought,” he said,

“When first I looked on thee,
That one so soft, so rosy red,
Could thus have beggared me!”

Seeing his fair estates in pawn,
And him in such decline, 65
I knew that his domain had gone
To lift up me and mine.

Next month upon a Sunday morn
A gunshot sounded nigh: 70
By his own hand my lordly born
Had doomed himself to die.

“Live, my dear Lord, and much of thine
Shall be restored to thee!”
He smiled, and said ’twixt word and sign, 75
“Alas — that cannot be!”

And while I searched his cabinet
For letters, keys, or will,
’Twas touching that his gaze was set
With love upon me still. 80

And when I burnt each document
Before his dying eyes,
’Twas sweet that he did not resent
My fear of compromise.

The steeple-cock gleamed golden when 85
I watched his spirit go:
And I became repentant then
That I had wrecked him so.

Three weeks at least had come and gone,
With many a saddened word, 90
Before I wrote to Gilbert on
The stroke that so had stirred.

And having worn a mournful gown,
I joined, in decent while,

My husband at a dashing town 95
To live in dashing style.

Yet though I now enjoy my fling,
And dine and dance and drive,
I'd give my prettiest emerald ring
To see my lord alive. 100

And when the meet on hunting-days
Is near his churchyard home,
I leave my bantering beaux to place
A flower upon his tomb;

And sometimes say: "Perhaps too late 105
The saints in Heaven deplore
That tender time when, moved by Fate,
He darked my cottage door."

1909

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