

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

8 *The Dead and the Living One*

The dead woman lay in her first night's grave,  
And twilight fell from the clouds' concave,  
And those she had asked to forgive forgave.

The woman passing came to a pause  
By the heaped white shapes of wreath and cross,       5  
And looked upon where the other was.

And as she mused there thus spoke she:  
"Never your countenance did I see,  
But you've been a good good friend to me!"

Rose a plaintive voice from the sod below:       10  
"O woman whose accents I do not know,  
What is it that makes you approve me so?"

"O dead one, ere my soldier went,  
I heard him saying, with warm intent,  
To his friend, when won by your blandishment:       15

"I would change for that lass here and now!  
And if I return I may break my vow  
To my present Love, and contrive somehow

"To call my own this new-found pearl,  
Whose eyes have the light, whose lips the curl       20  
I always have looked for in a girl!"

"—And this is why that by ceasing to be—  
Though never your countenance did I see—  
You prove you a good good friend to me;

“And I pray each hour for your soul’s repose                    25  
In gratitude for your joining those  
No lover will clasp when his campaigns close.”

Away she turned, when arose to her eye  
A martial phantom of gory dye,  
That said, with a thin and far-off sigh:                    30

“O sweetheart, neither shall I clasp you!  
For the foe this day has pierced me through,  
And sent me to where she is. Adieu!—

“And forget not when the night-wind’s whine                    35  
Calls over this turf where her limbs recline,  
That it travels on to lament by mine.”

There was a cry by the white-flowered mound,  
There was a laugh from underground,  
There was a deeper gloom around.

*1915*

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