Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

A Ballad-Tragedy (Circa 182–)

Part I

"I have a Love I love too well	
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;	
I have a Love I love too well,	
To whom, ere she was mine,	
'Such is my love for you,' I said,	5
'That you shall have to hood your head	
A silken kerchief crimson-red,	
Wove finest of the fine.'	
"And since this Love, for one mad moon	
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,	10
Since this my Love for one mad moon	
Did clasp me as her king,	
I snatched a silk-piece red and rare	
From off a stall at Priddy Fair,	
For handkerchief to hood her hair	15
When we went gallanting.	
"Full soon the four weeks neared their end	
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor;	
And when the four weeks neared their end,	
And their swift sweets outwore,	20
I said, 'What shall I do to own	
Those beauties bright as tulips blown,	
And keep you here with me alone	
As mine for evermore?'	
"And as she drowsed within my van	25
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor —	
And as she drowsed within my van,	
And dawning turned to day,	
She heavily raised her sloe-back eyes	

And murmured back in softest wise,	30
'One more thing, and the charms you prize	
Are yours henceforth for aye.	
"And swear I will I'll never go	
While Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor	
To meet the Cornish Wrestler Joe	35
For dance and dallyings.	
If you'll to yon cathedral shrine,	
And finger from the chest divine	
Treasure to buy me ear-drops fine,	
And richly jewelled rings.'	40
"I said: 'I am one who has gathered gear	
From Marlbury Downs to Dunkery Tor,	
Who has gathered gear for many a year	
From mansion, mart and fair;	
But at God's house I've stayed my hand,	45
Hearing within me some command —	
Curbed by a law not of the land	
From doing damage there!'	
"Whereat she pouts, this Love of mine,	
As Dunkery pouts to Exon Moor,	50
And still she pouts, this Love of mine,	
So cityward I go.	
But ere I start to do the thing,	
And speed my soul's imperilling	
For one who is my ravishing	55
And all the joy I know,	
"I come to lay this charge on thee —	
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor —	
I come to lay this charge on thee	
With solemn speech and sign:	60
Should things go ill, and my life pay	
For botchery in this rash assay,	
You are to take hers likewise — yea,	
The month the law takes mine.	
"For should my rival, Wrestler Joe,	65

Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor —	
My reckless rival, Wrestler Joe,	
My Love's bedwinner be,	
My rafted spirit would not rest,	
But wander weary and distrest 7	0
Throughout the world in wild protest:	
The thought nigh maddens me!"	

Part	Π
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Thus did he speak — this brother of mine —	
On Exon Wild by Dunkery Tor,	
Born at my birth of mother of mine,	75
And forthwith went his way	
To dare the deed some coming night	
I kept the watch with shaking sight,	
The moon at moments breaking bright,	
At others glooming gray.	80
For three full days I heard no sound	
Where Dunkery frowns on Exon Moor,	
I heard no sound at all around	
Whether his fay prevailed,	
Or one more foul the master were,	85
Till some afoot did tidings bear	
How that, for all his practised care,	
He had been caught and jailed.	
They had heard a crash when twelve had chimed	
By Mendip east of Dunkery Tor,	90
When twelve had chimed and moonlight climbed;	
They watched, and he was tracked	
By arch and aisle and saint and knight	
Of sculptured stonework sheeted white	
In the cathedral's ghostly light,	95
And captured in the act.	
Yes; for this Love he loved too well	
Where Dunkery sights the Severn shore,	
All for this Love he loved too well	
He burst the holy bars,	100
Seized golden vessels from the chest	

To buy her ornaments of the best,	
At her ill-witchery's request	
And lure of eyes like stars	
When blustering March confused the sky	105
In Toneborough Town by Exon Moor,	
When blustering March confused the sky	
They stretched him; and he died.	
Down in the crowd where I, to see	
The end of him, stood silently,	110
With a set face he lipped to me —	
"Remember." "Ay!" I cried.	
By night and day I shadowed her	
From Toneborough Deane to Dunkery Tor,	
I shadowed her asleep, astir,	115
And yet I could not bear —	
Till Wrestler Joe anon began	
To figure as her chosen man,	
And took her to his shining van —	
To doom a form so fair!	120
He made it handsome for her sake —	
And Dunkery smiled to Exon Moor —	
He made it handsome for her sake,	
Painting it out and in;	
And on the door of apple-green	125
A bright brass knocker soon was seen,	
And window-curtains white and clean	
For her to sit within.	
And all could see she clave to him	
As cleaves a cloud to Dunkery Tor,	130
Yea, all could see she clave to him,	
And every day I said,	
"A pity it seems to part those two	
That hourly grow to love more true:	
Yet she's the wanton woman who	135
Sent one to swing till dead!"	

That blew to blazing all my hate,

While Dunkery frowned on Exon Moor,	
And when the river swelled, her fate	
Came to her pitilessly	140
I dogged her, crying: "Across that plank	
They use as bridge to reach yon bank	
A coat and hat lie limp and dank;	
Your goodman's, can they be?"	
She paled, and went, I close behind —	145
And Exon frowned to Dunkery Tor,	
She went, and I came up behind	
And tipped the plank that bore	
Her, fleetly flitting across to eye	
What such might bode. She slid awry;	150
And from the current came a cry,	
A gurgle; and no more.	
How that befell no mortal knew	
From Marlbury Downs to Exon Moor;	
No mortal knew that deed undue	155
But he who schemed the crime,	
Which night still covers But in dream	
Those ropes of hair upon the stream	
He sees, and he will hear that scream	
Until his judgment-time.	160

1911

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