

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

27 *The Second Night*

(Ballad)

I missed one night, but the next I went;  
It was gusty above, and clear;  
She was there, with the look of one ill-content,  
And said: "Do not come near!"

— "I am sorry last night to have failed you here,                   5  
And now I have travelled all day;  
And it's long rowing back to the West-Hoe Pier,  
So brief must be my stay."

— "O man of mystery, why not say  
Out plain to me all you mean?   10  
Why you missed last night, and must now away  
Is — another has come between!"

— "O woman so mocking in mood and mien,  
So be it!" I replied:  
"And if I am due at a differing scene                                   15  
Before the dark has died,

"'Tis that, unresting, to wander wide  
Has ever been my plight,  
And at least I have met you at Cremyll side  
If not last eve, to-night."   20

— "You get small rest — that read I quite;  
And so do I, maybe;  
Though there's a rest hid safe from sight  
Elsewhere awaiting me!"

A mad star crossed the sky to the sea,                               25  
Wasting in sparks as it streamed,  
And when I looked back at her wistfully  
She had changed, much changed, it seemed.

The sparks of the star in her pupils gleamed,  
    She was vague as a vapour now,                     30  
And ere of its meaning I had dreamed  
    She'd vanished — I knew not how.

I stood on, long; each cliff-top bough,  
    Like a cynic nodding there,  
Moved up and down, though no man's brow                     35  
    But mine met the wayward air.

Still stood I, wholly unaware  
    Of what had come to pass,  
Or had brought the secret of my new Fair  
    To my old Love, alas!                                     40

I went down then by crag and grass  
    To the boat wherein I had come.  
Said the man with the oars: "This news of the lass  
    Of Edgcumbe, is sharp for some!

"Yes: found this daybreak, stiff and numb                     45  
    On the shore here, whither she'd sped  
To meet her lover last night in the glum,  
    And he came not, 'tis said.

"And she leapt down, heart-hit. Pity she's dead:  
    So much for the faithful-bent!" . . .                     50  
I looked, and again a star overhead  
    Shot through the firmament.

*1922*

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