

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

28 *The Slow Nature*

(An Incident of Froom Valley)

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

— “Ha, ha — go away! ’Tis a tale, methink, 5
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! 10
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 15
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: 20

“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 25
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; 30
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
And laughed in his ancient way.

1894

(From *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*. London:
Macmillan, 1930)