

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

2 *At Shag's Heath*

1685

(Traditional)

I grieve and grieve for what I have done,  
And nothing now is left to me  
But straight to drown; yea, I have slain  
The rarest soul the world shall see!  
—My husband said: “Now thou art wed 5  
Thou must beware! And should a man  
Cajole, mind, he means ill to thee,  
Depend on't: fool him if ye can!”  
But 'twas King Monmouth, he!

As truth I took what was not true: 10  
Till darked my door just such a one.  
He asked me but the way to go,  
Though looking all so down and done.  
And as he stood he said, unsued,  
“The prettiest wife I've eyed to-day!” 15  
And then he kissed me tenderly  
Before he footed fast away  
Did dear King Monmouth, he!

Builed was he so beautiful!—  
Why did I pout a pettish word 20  
For what he'd done?—Then whisking off—  
For his pursuers' feet were heard—  
“Dear one, keep faith!” he turns and saith.  
And next he vanished in the copse  
Before I knew what such might be, 25  
And how great fears and how great hopes  
Had rare King Monmouth—he!

Up rode the soldiers. “Where's this man?—  
He is the rebel Duke,” say they.

“And calls himself King Monmouth, sure!” 30  
Then I believed my husband; aye,  
Though he’d spoke lies in jealous-wise!  
—To Shag’s nigh copse beyond the road  
I moved my finger mercilessly;  
And there lay hidden where I showed: 35  
    My dear King Monmouth, he!

The soldiers brought him by my door,  
His elbows bound behind him, fast;  
Passing, he me-ward cast his eyes—  
What eyes of beauty did he cast! 40  
Grieved was his glance at me askance:  
“I wished all weal might thee attend,  
But this is what th’st done to me,  
O heartless woman, held my friend!”  
    Said sweet King Monmouth, he! 45

O then I saw he was no hind,  
But a great lord of loftihood,  
Come here to claim his rule and rights,  
Who’d wished me, as he’d said, but good.—  
With tug and jolt, then, out to Holt, 50  
To Justice Ettricke, he was led,  
And thence to London speedily,  
Where under yester’s headsman bled  
    The rare King Monmouth, he!

Last night, the while my husband slept, 55  
He rose up at the window there,  
All blood and blear, and hacked about,  
With heavy eyes, and rumpled hair;  
And said: “My Love, ’twas cruel of  
A Fair like thee to use me so! 60  
But now it’s nought: from foes I’m free!  
Sooner or later all must go,”  
    Said dear King Monmouth, he!

“Yes, lovely cruel one!” he said

In through the mullioned pane, shroud-pale, 65  
“I love you still, would kiss you now,  
But blood would stain your nighty-rail!”  
—That’s all. And so to drown I go:  
O wear no weeds, my friends, for me . . .  
When comes the waterman, he’ll say,  
“Who’s done her thuswise?”—’Twill be, yea, 70  
Sweet, slain King Monmouth—he!

*1925*

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