## Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

## 35 The Widow Betrothed

I passed the lodge and avenue	
To her fair tenement,	
And sunset on her window-panes	
Reflected our intent.	
The creeper on the gable nigh	5
Was fired to more than red,	
And when I came to halt thereby	
"Bright as my joy!" I said.	
Of late days it had been her aim	
To meet me in the hall;	10
Now at my footsteps no one came,	
And no one to my call.	
Again I knocked, and tardily	
An inner tread was heard,	
And I was shown her presence then	15
With a mere answering word.	
She met me, and but barely took	
My proffered warm embrace;	
Preoccupation weighed her look,	
And hardened her sweet face.	20
"To-morrow — could you — would you call?	
Abridge your present stay?	
My child is ill — my one, my all! —	
And can't be left to-day."	
And then she turns, and gives commands	25
As I were out of sound,	
Or were no more to her and hers	
Than any neighbour round	

<ul> <li>As maid I loved her; but one came And pleased, and coaxed, and wooed.</li> <li>And when in time he wedded her I deemed her gone for good.</li> </ul>	30
He won, I lost her; and my loss I bore I know not how;	
But I do think I suffered then	35
Less wretchedness than now.	
For Time, in taking him, unclosed An unexpected door	
Of bliss for me, which grew to seem	
Far surer than before.	40
Yet in my haste I overlooked When secondly I sued That then, as not at first, she had learnt	
The call of motherhood	
Her word is steadfast, and I know How firmly pledged are we: But a new love-claim shares her since She smiled as maid on me!	45
c. 1867	

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