

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

3 The Ballad of Love's Skeleton
(179-)

"Come, let's to Culliford Hill and Wood,
And watch the squirrels climb,
And look in sunny places there
For shepherds' thyme."

—"Can I have heart for Culliford Wood, 5
And hill and bank and tree,
Who know and ponder over all
Things done by me!"

—"Then, Dear, don hat, and come along: 10
We'll strut the Royal strand;
King George has just arrived, his Court,
His guards, and band."

—"You are a Baron of the King's Court
From Hanover lately come, 15
And can forget in song and dance
What chills me numb.

"Well be the royal scenes for you,
And band beyond compare,
But how is she who hates her crime
To frolic there? 20

"O why did you so urge and
say 'Twould soil your noble name!—
I should have prized a little child,
And faced the shame.

"I see the child—that should have been, 25
But was not, born alive;
With such a deed in a woman's life
A year seems five.

"I asked not for the wifely rank,
Nor maiden honour saved; 30

To call a nestling thing my own
 Was all I craved.

“For what’s the hurt of shame to one
 Of no more note than me?
 Can littlest life beneath the sun
 More littled be?” 35

—“Nay, never grieve. The day is bright,
 Just as it was ere then:
 In the Assembly Rooms to-night
 Let’s joy again! 40

“The new Quick-Step is the sweetest dance
 For lively toes and heels;
 And when we tire of that we’ll prance
 Bewitching reels.

“Dear, never grieve! As once we whirled 45
 So let us whirl to-night,
 Forgetting all things save ourselves
 Till dawning light.

“The King and Queen, Princesses three,
 Have promised to meet there 50
 The mayor and townsfolk. I’ve my card
 And One to spare.

“The Court will dance at the upper end;
 Only a cord between
 Them and the burgher-throng below; 55
 A brilliant scene!”

—“I’ll go. You’ve still my heart in thrall:
 Save you, all’s dark to me.
 And God knows what, when love is all,
 The end will be!” 60

1928

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