

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

9 *The Forbidden Banns*

A Ballad of the Eighteen-Thirties

I

“O what’s the gain, my worthy Sir,
In stopping the banns to-day!
Your son declares he’ll marry her
If a thousand folk say Nay.”

“I’ll do’t; I’ll do’t; whether or no! 5
And, if I drop down dead,
To church this morning I will go,
And say they shall not wed!”

That day the parson clear outspoke
The maid’s name and the man’s: 10
His father, mid the assembled folk,
Said, “I forbid the banns!”

Then, white in face, lips pale and cold,
He turned him to sit down,
When he fell forward; and behold, 15
They found his life had flown.

II

’Twas night-time, towards the middle part,
When low her husband said,
“I would from the bottom of my heart
That father was not dead!” 20

She turned from one to the other side,
And a sad woman was she
As he went on: “He’d not have died
Had it not been for me!”

She brought him soon an idiot child, 25
And then she brought another:
His face waned wan, his manner wild
With hatred of their mother.

“Hearken to me, my son. No: no:
There’s madness in her blood!” 30
Those were his father’s words; and lo,
Now, now he understood.

What noise is that? One noise, and two
Resound from a near gun.
Two corpses found: and neighbours knew 35
By whom the deed was done.

1925

(From *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*.
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