

Poetry & Pros

English author Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), is best known for his novels, such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). He later abandoned writing novels in favor of poetry, including *The Ruined Maid* (1901). This delightful little poem satirizes the Victorian view of prostitutes as doomed and “ruined” women, and suggests that they may in fact be happy and refined. Indeed, their high incomes and resulting financial independence made prostitutes worthy of envy.

The Ruined Maid

by Thomas Hardy

“O ‘Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!
Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?
And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?”—
“O didn’t you know I’d been ruined?” said she.
—“You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
And now you’ve gay bracelets and bright feathers three!”—
“Yes: that’s how we dress when we’re ruined,” said she.
—“At home in the barton you said ‘thee’ and ‘thou,’
And ‘thik oon’ and ‘theäs oon’ and ‘t’other’; but now
Your talking quite fits ‘ee for high compan-ny!”—
“Some polish is gained with one’s ruin,” said she.
—“Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak
But now I’m bewitched by your delicate cheek,
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!”—
“We never do work when we’re ruined,” said she.
—“You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you’d sigh, and you’d sock; but at present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!”—
“True. One’s pretty lively when ruined,” said she.
—“I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town.”—
“My dear - a raw country girl, such as you be,
Cannot quite expect that. You ain’t ruined,” said she.



Express Yourself! Are you a budding wordsmith?

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