The Going

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Never to bid good-bye,
Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
Unmoved, unknowing
That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

Why do you make me leave the house
And think for a breath it is you I see
At the end of the alley of bending boughs
Where so often at dusk you used to be;
Till in darkening dankness
The yawning blankness
Of the perspective sickens me!

You were she who abode
By those red-veined rocks far West,
You were the swan-necked one who rode
Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
And, reining nigh me,
Would muse and eye me,
While Life unrolled us its very best.

Why, then, latterly did we not speak,
Did we not think of those days long dead,
And ere your vanishing strive to seek
That time's renewal? We might have said,
"In this bright spring weather
We'll visit together
Those places that once we visited."

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing—
Not even I—would undo me so!

_The Going:_

"The Going", like most of the pieces in this section, is written in the first person; here Hardy evidently speaks for himself. The poem is in the form of a monologue addressed to Emma, containing many questions, the answers to which only she can supply.

Hardy asks Emma why she did not alert him to her imminent death, but left him "as if indifferent quite" to his feelings, without bidding him farewell: neither softly speaking words of parting, nor even asking him to speak a last word to her. He notes how, as the day dawned, he was unaware of what was happening to his wife, and of how this "altered all".

Hardy asks Emma why she compels him to go outside, making him think, momentarily, he sees her figure in the dusk, in the place where she used to stand, but ultimately distressing him as, in the gathering gloom, he sees only "yawning blankness" and not the familiar figure of Emma.

Turning back to the days when Emma's youth and beauty captivated him, Hardy wonders why, in later years, the joys of their courtship were neither remembered nor revived. He imagines how they might
have rekindled their love by revisiting the places where they met while courting.

Finally Hardy concedes that what has happened cannot be changed and that he is as good as dead, waiting for the end ("to sink down soon") and, in conclusion, informs Emma that she could not know how so sudden and unexpected a passing as hers could distress him as much as it has.

The metre of the poem is surprisingly lively, though the rhythm breaks down in the disjointed syntax and brief sentences of the final stanza. The brief rhyming couplet in the penultimate two lines of each stanza exaggerate this jauntiness, which seems rather inappropriate to the subject of the piece.

Though the reader sympathises with Hardy's evident grief, it is difficult not to be a little impatient with his tendency to wallow in self-pity. He reproaches Emma for leaving him, and thinks despairingly of his and her failure to rekindle, in later years, their youthful affection: yet, one feels that this is a tragedy largely of his own making. He has, after all, had some forty years in which to "seek/That time's renewal". The fact that he only expresses regret at his failure to do so when the possibility has been removed by Emma's death casts doubt upon the sincerity of his grief.