

PART THE THIRD--SUMMER

CHAPTER I: DRIVING OUT OF BUDMOUTH

An easy bend of neck and graceful set of head; full and wavy bundles of dark-brown hair; light fall of little feet; pretty devices on the skirt of the dress; clear deep eyes; in short, a bunch of sweets: it was Fancy! Dick's heart went round to her with a rush.

The scene was the corner of Mary Street in Budmouth-Regis, near the King's statue, at which point the white angle of the last house in the row cut perpendicularly an embayed and nearly motionless expanse of salt water projected from the outer ocean--to-day lit in bright tones of green and opal. Dick and Smart had just emerged from the street, and there on the right, against the brilliant sheet of liquid colour, stood Fancy Day; and she turned and recognized him.

Dick suspended his thoughts of the letter and wonder at how she came there by driving close to the chains of the Esplanade--incontinently displacing two chairmen, who had just come to life for the summer in new clean shirts and revived clothes, and being almost displaced in turn by a rigid boy rattling along with a baker's cart, and looking neither to the right nor the left. He asked if she were going to Mellstock that night.

"Yes, I'm waiting for the carrier," she replied, seeming, too, to suspend thoughts of the letter.

"Now I can drive you home nicely, and you save half an hour. Will ye come with me?"

As Fancy's power to will anything seemed to have departed in some mysterious manner at that moment, Dick settled the matter by getting out and assisting her into the vehicle without another word.

The temporary flush upon her cheek changed to a lesser hue, which was permanent, and at length their eyes met; there was present between them a certain feeling of embarrassment, which arises at such moments when all the instinctive acts dictated by the position have been performed. Dick, being engaged with the reins, thought less of this awkwardness than did Fancy, who had nothing to do but to feel his presence, and to be more and more conscious of the fact, that by accepting a seat beside him in this way she succumbed to the tone of his note. Smart jogged along, and Dick jogged, and the helpless Fancy necessarily jogged, too; and she felt that she was in a measure captured and made a prisoner.

"I am so much obliged to you for your company, Miss Day," he observed, as they drove past the two semicircular bays of the Old Royal Hotel, where His Majesty King George the Third had many a time attended the balls of the burgesses.

To Miss Day, crediting him with the same consciousness of mastery--a consciousness of which he was perfectly innocent--this remark sounded like a magnanimous intention to soothe her, the captive.

"I didn't come for the pleasure of obliging you with my company," she said.

The answer had an unexpected manner of incivility in it that must have been rather surprising to young Dewy. At the same time it may be observed, that when a young woman returns a rude answer to a young man's civil remark, her heart is in a state which argues rather hopefully for his case than otherwise.

There was silence between them till they had left the sea-front and passed about twenty of the trees that ornamented the road leading up out of the town towards Casterbridge and Mellstock.

"Though I didn't come for that purpose either, I would have done it," said Dick at the twenty-first tree.

"Now, Mr. Dewy, no flirtation, because it's wrong, and I don't wish it."

Dick seated himself afresh just as he had been sitting before, arranged his looks very emphatically, and cleared his throat.

"Really, anybody would think you had met me on business and were just going to commence," said the lady intractably.

"Yes, they would."

"Why, you never have, to be sure!"

This was a shaky beginning. He chopped round, and said cheerily, as a man who had resolved never to spoil his jollity by loving one of womankind--

"Well, how are you getting on, Miss Day, at the present time? Gaily, I don't doubt for a moment."

"I am not gay, Dick; you know that."

"Gaily doesn't mean decked in gay dresses."

"I didn't suppose gaily was gaily dressed. Mighty me, what a scholar you've grown!"

"Lots of things have happened to you this spring, I see."

"What have you seen?"

"O, nothing; I've heard, I mean!"

"What have you heard?"

"The name of a pretty man, with brass studs and a copper ring and a tin watch-chain, a little mixed up with your own. That's all."

"That's a very unkind picture of Mr. Shiner, for that's who you mean! The studs are gold, as you know, and it's a real silver chain; the ring I can't conscientiously defend, and he only wore it once."

"He might have worn it a hundred times without showing it half so much."

"Well, he's nothing to me," she serenely observed.

"Not any more than I am?"

"Now, Mr. Dewy," said Fancy severely, "certainly he isn't any more to me than you are!"

"Not so much?"

She looked aside to consider the precise compass of that question. "That I can't exactly answer," she replied with soft archness.

As they were going rather slowly, another spring-cart, containing a

farmer, farmer's wife, and farmer's man, jogged past them; and the farmer's wife and farmer's man eyed the couple very curiously. The farmer never looked up from the horse's tail.

"Why can't you exactly answer?" said Dick, quickening Smart a little, and jogging on just behind the farmer and farmer's wife and man.

As no answer came, and as their eyes had nothing else to do, they both contemplated the picture presented in front, and noticed how the farmer's wife sat flattened between the two men, who bulged over each end of the seat to give her room, till they almost sat upon their respective wheels; and they looked too at the farmer's wife's silk mantle, inflating itself between her shoulders like a balloon and sinking flat again, at each jog of the horse. The farmer's wife, feeling their eyes sticking into her back, looked over her shoulder. Dick dropped ten yards further behind.

"Fancy, why can't you answer?" he repeated.

"Because how much you are to me depends upon how much I am to you," said

she in low tones.

"Everything," said Dick, putting his hand towards hers, and casting emphatic eyes upon the upper curve of her cheek.

"Now, Richard Dewy, no touching me! I didn't say in what way your

thinking of me affected the question--perhaps inversely, don't you see?

No touching, sir! Look; goodness me, don't, Dick!"

The cause of her sudden start was the unpleasant appearance over Dick's right shoulder of an empty timber-wagon and four journeymen-carpenters reclining in lazy postures inside it, their eyes directed upwards at various oblique angles into the surrounding world, the chief object of their existence being apparently to criticize to the very backbone and marrow every animate object that came within the compass of their vision. This difficulty of Dick's was overcome by trotting on till the wagon and carpenters were beginning to look rather misty by reason of a film of dust that accompanied their wagon-wheels, and rose around their heads like a fog.

"Say you love me, Fancy."

"No, Dick, certainly not; 't isn't time to do that yet."

"Why, Fancy?"

"'Miss Day' is better at present--don't mind my saying so; and I ought not to have called you Dick."

"Nonsense! when you know that I would do anything on earth for your love. Why, you make any one think that loving is a thing that can be done and undone, and put on and put off at a mere whim."

"No, no, I don't," she said gently; "but there are things which tell me I ought not to give way to much thinking about you, even if--"

"But you want to, don't you? Yes, say you do; it is best to be truthful. Whatever they may say about a woman's right to conceal where her love lies, and pretend it doesn't exist, and things like that, it is not best; I do know it, Fancy. And an honest woman in that, as well as in all her daily concerns, shines most brightly, and is thought most of in the long-run."

"Well then, perhaps, Dick, I do love you a little," she whispered tenderly; "but I wish you wouldn't say any more now."

"I won't say any more now, then, if you don't like it, dear. But you do love me a little, don't you?"

"Now you ought not to want me to keep saying things twice; I can't say any more now, and you must be content with what you have."

"I may at any rate call you Fancy? There's no harm in that."

"Yes, you may."

"And you'll not call me Mr. Dewy any more?"

"Very well."

CHAPTER II: FURTHER ALONG THE ROAD

Dick's spirits having risen in the course of these admissions of his sweetheart, he now touched Smart with the whip; and on Smart's neck, not far behind his ears. Smart, who had been lost in thought for some time, never dreaming that Dick could reach so far with a whip which, on this particular journey, had never been extended further than his flank, tossed his head, and scampered along with exceeding briskness, which was very pleasant to the young couple behind him till, turning a bend in the road, they came instantly upon the farmer, farmer's man, and farmer's wife with the flapping mantle, all jogging on just the same as ever.

"Bother those people! Here we are upon them again."

"Well, of course. They have as much right to the road as we."

"Yes, but it is provoking to be overlooked so. I like a road all to myself. Look what a lumbering affair theirs is!" The wheels of the farmer's cart, just at that moment, jogged into a depression running across the road, giving the cart a twist, whereupon all three nodded to the left, and on coming out of it all three nodded to the right, and went