

whole that confronted each other at the perfect moment; a missing counterpart wandered independently about the earth waiting in crass obtuseness till the late time came. Out of which maladroit delay sprang anxieties, disappointments, shocks, catastrophes, and passing-strange destinies.

When d'Urberville got back to the tent he sat down astride on a chair, reflecting, with a pleased gleam in his face. Then he broke into a loud laugh.

"Well, I'm damned! What a funny thing! Ha-ha-ha! And what a crumby girl!"

VI

Tess went down the hill to Trantridge Cross, and inattentively waited to take her seat in the van returning from Chaseborough to Shaston. She did not know what the other occupants said to her as she entered, though she answered them; and when they had started anew she rode along with an inward and not an outward eye.

One among her fellow-travellers addressed her more pointedly than any had spoken before: "Why, you be quite a posy! And such roses in

early June!"

Then she became aware of the spectacle she presented to their surprised vision: roses at her breasts; roses in her hat; roses and strawberries in her basket to the brim. She blushed, and said confusedly that the flowers had been given to her. When the passengers were not looking she stealthily removed the more prominent blooms from her hat and placed them in the basket, where she covered them with her handkerchief. Then she fell to reflecting again, and in looking downwards a thorn of the rose remaining in her breast accidentally pricked her chin. Like all the cottagers in Blackmoor Vale, Tess was steeped in fancies and prefigurative superstitions; she thought this an ill omen--the first she had noticed that day.

The van travelled only so far as Shaston, and there were several miles of pedestrian descent from that mountain-town into the vale to Marlott. Her mother had advised her to stay here for the night, at the house of a cottage-woman they knew, if she should feel too tired to come on; and this Tess did, not descending to her home till the following afternoon.

When she entered the house she perceived in a moment from her mother's triumphant manner that something had occurred in the interim.

"Oh yes; I know all about it! I told 'ee it would be all right, and

now 'tis proved!"

"Since I've been away? What has?" said Tess rather wearily.

Her mother surveyed the girl up and down with arch approval, and went on banteringly: "So you've brought 'em round!"

"How do you know, mother?"

"I've had a letter."

Tess then remembered that there would have been time for this.

"They say--Mrs d'Urberville says--that she wants you to look after a little fowl-farm which is her hobby. But this is only her artful way of getting 'ee there without raising your hopes. She's going to own 'ee as kin--that's the meaning o't."

"But I didn't see her."

"You zid somebody, I suppose?"

"I saw her son."

"And did he own 'ee?"

"Well--he called me Coz."

"An' I knew it! Jacky--he called her Coz!" cried Joan to her husband. "Well, he spoke to his mother, of course, and she do want 'ee there."

"But I don't know that I am apt at tending fowls," said the dubious Tess.

"Then I don't know who is apt. You've be'n born in the business, and brought up in it. They that be born in a business always know more about it than any 'prentice. Besides, that's only just a show of something for you to do, that you midn't feel beholden."

"I don't altogether think I ought to go," said Tess thoughtfully.

"Who wrote the letter? Will you let me look at it?"

"Mrs d'Urberville wrote it. Here it is."

The letter was in the third person, and briefly informed Mrs Durbeyfield that her daughter's services would be useful to that lady in the management of her poultry-farm, that a comfortable room would be provided for her if she could come, and that the wages would be on a liberal scale if they liked her.

"Oh--that's all!" said Tess.

"You couldn't expect her to throw her arms round 'ee, an' to kiss and to coll 'ee all at once."

Tess looked out of the window.

"I would rather stay here with father and you," she said.

"But why?"

"I'd rather not tell you why, mother; indeed, I don't quite know why."

A week afterwards she came in one evening from an unavailing search for some light occupation in the immediate neighbourhood. Her idea had been to get together sufficient money during the summer to purchase another horse. Hardly had she crossed the threshold before one of the children danced across the room, saying, "The gentleman's been here!"

Her mother hastened to explain, smiles breaking from every inch of her person. Mrs d'Urberville's son had called on horseback, having been riding by chance in the direction of Marlott. He had wished to know, finally, in the name of his mother, if Tess could really come to manage the old lady's fowl-farm or not; the lad who had hitherto superintended the birds having proved untrustworthy. "Mr

d'Urberville says you must be a good girl if you are at all as you appear; he knows you must be worth your weight in gold. He is very much interested in 'ee--truth to tell."

Tess seemed for the moment really pleased to hear that she had won such high opinion from a stranger when, in her own esteem, she had sunk so low.

"It is very good of him to think that," she murmured; "and if I was quite sure how it would be living there, I would go any-when."

"He is a mighty handsome man!"

"I don't think so," said Tess coldly.

"Well, there's your chance, whether or no; and I'm sure he wears a beautiful diamond ring!"

"Yes," said little Abraham, brightly, from the window-bench; "and I seed it! and it did twinkle when he put his hand up to his mistarshers. Mother, why did our grand relation keep on putting his hand up to his mistarshers?"

"Hark at that child!" cried Mrs Durbeyfield, with parenthetic admiration.

"Perhaps to show his diamond ring," murmured Sir John, dreamily, from his chair.

"I'll think it over," said Tess, leaving the room.

"Well, she's made a conquest o' the younger branch of us, straight off," continued the matron to her husband, "and she's a fool if she don't follow it up."

"I don't quite like my children going away from home," said the haggler. "As the head of the family, the rest ought to come to me."

"But do let her go, Jacky," coaxed his poor witless wife. "He's struck wi' her--you can see that. He called her Coz! He'll marry her, most likely, and make a lady of her; and then she'll be what her forefathers was."

John Durbeyfield had more conceit than energy or health, and this supposition was pleasant to him.

"Well, perhaps that's what young Mr d'Urberville means," he admitted; "and sure enough he mid have serious thoughts about improving his blood by linking on to the old line. Tess, the little rogue! And have she really paid 'em a visit to such an end as this?"

Meanwhile Tess was walking thoughtfully among the gooseberry-bushes

in the garden, and over Prince's grave. When she came in her mother pursued her advantage.

"Well, what be you going to do?" she asked.

"I wish I had seen Mrs d'Urberville," said Tess.

"I think you mid as well settle it. Then you'll see her soon enough."

Her father coughed in his chair.

"I don't know what to say!" answered the girl restlessly. "It is for you to decide. I killed the old horse, and I suppose I ought to do something to get ye a new one. But--but--I don't quite like Mr d'Urberville being there!"

The children, who had made use of this idea of Tess being taken up by their wealthy kinsfolk (which they imagined the other family to be) as a species of dolorifuge after the death of the horse, began to cry at Tess's reluctance, and teased and reproached her for hesitating.

"Tess won't go-o-o and be made a la-a-dy of!--no, she says she wo-o-on't!" they wailed, with square mouths. "And we shan't have a nice new horse, and lots o' golden money to buy fairlings! And Tess won't look pretty in her best cloze no mo-o-ore!"

Her mother chimed in to the same tune: a certain way she had of making her labours in the house seem heavier than they were by prolonging them indefinitely, also weighed in the argument. Her father alone preserved an attitude of neutrality.

"I will go," said Tess at last.

Her mother could not repress her consciousness of the nuptial vision conjured up by the girl's consent.

"That's right! For such a pretty maid as 'tis, this is a fine chance!"

Tess smiled crossly.

"I hope it is a chance for earning money. It is no other kind of chance. You had better say nothing of that silly sort about parish."

Mrs Durbeyfield did not promise. She was not quite sure that she did not feel proud enough, after the visitor's remarks, to say a good deal.

Thus it was arranged; and the young girl wrote, agreeing to be ready to set out on any day on which she might be required. She was duly informed that Mrs d'Urberville was glad of her decision, and that a

spring-cart should be sent to meet her and her luggage at the top of the Vale on the day after the morrow, when she must hold herself prepared to start. Mrs d'Urberville's handwriting seemed rather masculine.

"A cart?" murmured Joan Durbeyfield doubtfully. "It might have been a carriage for her own kin!"

Having at last taken her course Tess was less restless and abstracted, going about her business with some self-assurance in the thought of acquiring another horse for her father by an occupation which would not be onerous. She had hoped to be a teacher at the school, but the fates seemed to decide otherwise. Being mentally older than her mother she did not regard Mrs Durbeyfield's matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect for a moment. The light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth.

VII

On the morning appointed for her departure Tess was awake before dawn--at the marginal minute of the dark when the grove is still mute, save for one prophetic bird who sings with a clear-voiced