

no time to-day to take it home and mix it with the bulk afore sending off. It must go to station straight from here. Who'll drive it across?"

Mr Clare volunteered to do so, though it was none of his business, asking Tess to accompany him. The evening, though sunless, had been warm and muggy for the season, and Tess had come out with her milking-hood only, naked-armed and jacketless; certainly not dressed for a drive. She therefore replied by glancing over her scant habiliments; but Clare gently urged her. She assented by relinquishing her pail and stool to the dairyman to take home, and mounted the spring-waggon beside Clare.

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In the diminishing daylight they went along the level roadway through the meads, which stretched away into gray miles, and were backed in the extreme edge of distance by the swarthy and abrupt slopes of Egdon Heath. On its summit stood clumps and stretches of fir-trees, whose notched tips appeared like battlemented towers crowning black-fronted castles of enchantment.

They were so absorbed in the sense of being close to each other that

they did not begin talking for a long while, the silence being broken only by the clucking of the milk in the tall cans behind them. The lane they followed was so solitary that the hazel nuts had remained on the boughs till they slipped from their shells, and the blackberries hung in heavy clusters. Every now and then Angel would fling the lash of his whip round one of these, pluck it off, and give it to his companion.

The dull sky soon began to tell its meaning by sending down herald-drops of rain, and the stagnant air of the day changed into a fitful breeze which played about their faces. The quick-silvery glaze on the rivers and pools vanished; from broad mirrors of light they changed to lustreless sheets of lead, with a surface like a rasp. But that spectacle did not affect her preoccupation. Her countenance, a natural carnation slightly embrowned by the season, had deepened its tinge with the beating of the rain-drops; and her hair, which the pressure of the cows' flanks had, as usual, caused to tumble down from its fastenings and stray beyond the curtain of her calico bonnet, was made clammy by the moisture, till it hardly was better than seaweed.

"I ought not to have come, I suppose," she murmured, looking at the sky.

"I am sorry for the rain," said he. "But how glad I am to have you here!"

Remote Egdon disappeared by degree behind the liquid gauze. The evening grew darker, and the roads being crossed by gates, it was not safe to drive faster than at a walking pace. The air was rather chill.

"I am so afraid you will get cold, with nothing upon your arms and shoulders," he said. "Creep close to me, and perhaps the drizzle won't hurt you much. I should be sorrier still if I did not think that the rain might be helping me."

She imperceptibly crept closer, and he wrapped round them both a large piece of sail-cloth, which was sometimes used to keep the sun off the milk-cans. Tess held it from slipping off him as well as herself, Clare's hands being occupied.

"Now we are all right again. Ah--no we are not! It runs down into my neck a little, and it must still more into yours. That's better. Your arms are like wet marble, Tess. Wipe them in the cloth. Now, if you stay quiet, you will not get another drop. Well, dear--about that question of mine--that long-standing question?"

The only reply that he could hear for a little while was the smack of the horse's hoofs on the moistening road, and the cluck of the milk in the cans behind them.

"Do you remember what you said?"

"I do," she replied.

"Before we get home, mind."

"I'll try."

He said no more then. As they drove on, the fragment of an old manor house of Caroline date rose against the sky, and was in due course passed and left behind.

"That," he observed, to entertain her, "is an interesting old place--one of the several seats which belonged to an ancient Norman family formerly of great influence in this county, the d'Urbervilles. I never pass one of their residences without thinking of them. There is something very sad in the extinction of a family of renown, even if it was fierce, domineering, feudal renown."

"Yes," said Tess.

They crept along towards a point in the expanse of shade just at hand at which a feeble light was beginning to assert its presence, a spot where, by day, a fitful white streak of steam at intervals upon the dark green background denoted intermittent moments of contact between their secluded world and modern life. Modern life stretched out its

steam feeler to this point three or four times a day, touched the native existences, and quickly withdrew its feeler again, as if what it touched had been uncongenial.

They reached the feeble light, which came from the smoky lamp of a little railway station; a poor enough terrestrial star, yet in one sense of more importance to Talbothays Dairy and mankind than the celestial ones to which it stood in such humiliating contrast. The cans of new milk were unladen in the rain, Tess getting a little shelter from a neighbouring holly tree.

Then there was the hissing of a train, which drew up almost silently upon the wet rails, and the milk was rapidly swung can by can into the truck. The light of the engine flashed for a second upon Tess Durbeyfield's figure, motionless under the great holly tree. No object could have looked more foreign to the gleaming cranks and wheels than this unsophisticated girl, with the round bare arms, the rainy face and hair, the suspended attitude of a friendly leopard at pause, the print gown of no date or fashion, and the cotton bonnet drooping on her brow.

She mounted again beside her lover, with a mute obedience characteristic of impassioned natures at times, and when they had wrapped themselves up over head and ears in the sailcloth again, they plunged back into the now thick night. Tess was so receptive that the few minutes of contact with the whirl of material progress

lingered in her thought.

"Londoners will drink it at their breakfasts to-morrow, won't they?" she asked. "Strange people that we have never seen."

"Yes--I suppose they will. Though not as we send it. When its strength has been lowered, so that it may not get up into their heads."

"Noble men and noble women, ambassadors and centurions, ladies and tradeswomen, and babies who have never seen a cow."

"Well, yes; perhaps; particularly centurions."

"Who don't know anything of us, and where it comes from; or think how we two drove miles across the moor to-night in the rain that it might reach 'em in time?"

"We did not drive entirely on account of these precious Londoners; we drove a little on our own--on account of that anxious matter which you will, I am sure, set at rest, dear Tess. Now, permit me to put it in this way. You belong to me already, you know; your heart, I mean. Does it not?"

"You know as well as I. O yes--yes!"

"Then, if your heart does, why not your hand?"

"My only reason was on account of you--on account of a question. I have something to tell you--"

"But suppose it to be entirely for my happiness, and my worldly convenience also?"

"O yes; if it is for your happiness and worldly convenience. But my life before I came here--I want--"

"Well, it is for my convenience as well as my happiness. If I have a very large farm, either English or colonial, you will be invaluable as a wife to me; better than a woman out of the largest mansion in the country. So please--please, dear Tessy, disabuse your mind of the feeling that you will stand in my way."

"But my history. I want you to know it--you must let me tell you--you will not like me so well!"

"Tell it if you wish to, dearest. This precious history then. Yes, I was born at so and so, Anno Domini--"

"I was born at Marlott," she said, catching at his words as a help, lightly as they were spoken. "And I grew up there. And I was in the Sixth Standard when I left school, and they said I had great aptness,

and should make a good teacher, so it was settled that I should be one. But there was trouble in my family; father was not very industrious, and he drank a little."

"Yes, yes. Poor child! Nothing new." He pressed her more closely to his side.

"And then--there is something very unusual about it--about me. I--I was--"

Tess's breath quickened.

"Yes, dearest. Never mind."

"I--I--am not a Durbeyfield, but a d'Urberville--a descendant of the same family as those that owned the old house we passed. And--we are all gone to nothing!"

"A d'Urberville!--Indeed! And is that all the trouble, dear Tess?"

"Yes," she answered faintly.

"Well--why should I love you less after knowing this?"

"I was told by the dairyman that you hated old families."



He laughed.

"Well, it is true, in one sense. I do hate the aristocratic principle of blood before everything, and do think that as reasoners the only pedigrees we ought to respect are those spiritual ones of the wise and virtuous, without regard to corporal paternity. But I am extremely interested in this news--you can have no idea how interested I am! Are you not interested yourself in being one of that well-known line?"

"No. I have thought it sad--especially since coming here, and knowing that many of the hills and fields I see once belonged to my father's people. But other hills and field belonged to Retty's people, and perhaps others to Marian's, so that I don't value it particularly."

"Yes--it is surprising how many of the present tillers of the soil were once owners of it, and I sometimes wonder that a certain school of politicians don't make capital of the circumstance; but they don't seem to know it... I wonder that I did not see the resemblance of your name to d'Urberville, and trace the manifest corruption. And this was the carking secret!"

She had not told. At the last moment her courage had failed her; she feared his blame for not telling him sooner; and her instinct of self-preservation was stronger than her candour.

"Of course," continued the unwitting Clare, "I should have been glad to know you to be descended exclusively from the long-suffering, dumb, unrecorded rank and file of the English nation, and not from the self-seeking few who made themselves powerful at the expense of the rest. But I am corrupted away from that by my affection for you, Tess (he laughed as he spoke), and made selfish likewise. For your own sake I rejoice in your descent. Society is hopelessly snobbish, and this fact of your extraction may make an appreciable difference to its acceptance of you as my wife, after I have made you the well-read woman that I mean to make you. My mother too, poor soul, will think so much better of you on account of it. Tess, you must spell your name correctly--d'Urberville--from this very day."

"I like the other way rather best."

"But you MUST, dearest! Good heavens, why dozens of mushroom millionaires would jump at such a possession! By the bye, there's one of that kidney who has taken the name--where have I heard of him?--Up in the neighbourhood of The Chase, I think. Why, he is the very man who had that rumpus with my father I told you of. What an odd coincidence!"

"Angel, I think I would rather not take the name! It is unlucky, perhaps!"

She was agitated.

"Now then, Mistress Teresa d'Urberville, I have you. Take my name, and so you will escape yours! The secret is out, so why should you any longer refuse me?"

"If it is SURE to make you happy to have me as your wife, and you feel that you do wish to marry me, VERY, VERY much--"

"I do, dearest, of course!"

"I mean, that it is only your wanting me very much, and being hardly able to keep alive without me, whatever my offences, that would make me feel I ought to say I will."

"You will--you do say it, I know! You will be mine for ever and ever."

He clasped her close and kissed her.

"Yes!"

She had no sooner said it than she burst into a dry hard sobbing, so violent that it seemed to rend her. Tess was not a hysterical girl by any means, and he was surprised.

"Why do you cry, dearest?"

"I can't tell--quite!--I am so glad to think--of being yours, and making you happy!"

"But this does not seem very much like gladness, my Tessy!"

"I mean--I cry because I have broken down in my vow! I said I would die unmarried!"

"But, if you love me you would like me to be your husband?"

"Yes, yes, yes! But O, I sometimes wish I had never been born!"

"Now, my dear Tess, if I did not know that you are very much excited, and very inexperienced, I should say that remark was not very complimentary. How came you to wish that if you care for me? Do you care for me? I wish you would prove it in some way."

"How can I prove it more than I have done?" she cried, in a distraction of tenderness. "Will this prove it more?"

She clasped his neck, and for the first time Clare learnt what an impassioned woman's kisses were like upon the lips of one whom she loved with all her heart and soul, as Tess loved him.

"There--now do you believe?" she asked, flushed, and wiping her eyes.

"Yes. I never really doubted--never, never!"

So they drove on through the gloom, forming one bundle inside the sail-cloth, the horse going as he would, and the rain driving against them. She had consented. She might as well have agreed at first. The "appetite for joy" which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed, was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric.

"I must write to my mother," she said. "You don't mind my doing that?"

"Of course not, dear child. You are a child to me, Tess, not to know how very proper it is to write to your mother at such a time, and how wrong it would be in me to object. Where does she live?"

"At the same place--Marlott. On the further side of Blackmoor Vale."

"Ah, then I HAVE seen you before this summer--"

"Yes; at that dance on the green; but you would not dance with me. O, I hope that is of no ill-omen for us now!"