

Tess *of the* d'Urbervilles





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A pretty young girl has to leave home to make money for her family. She is clever and a good worker; but she is uneducated and does not know the cruel ways of the world. So, when a rich young man says he loves her, she is careful – but not careful enough. He is persuasive, and she is overwhelmed. It is not her fault, but the world says it is. Her young life is already stained by men's desires, and by death.

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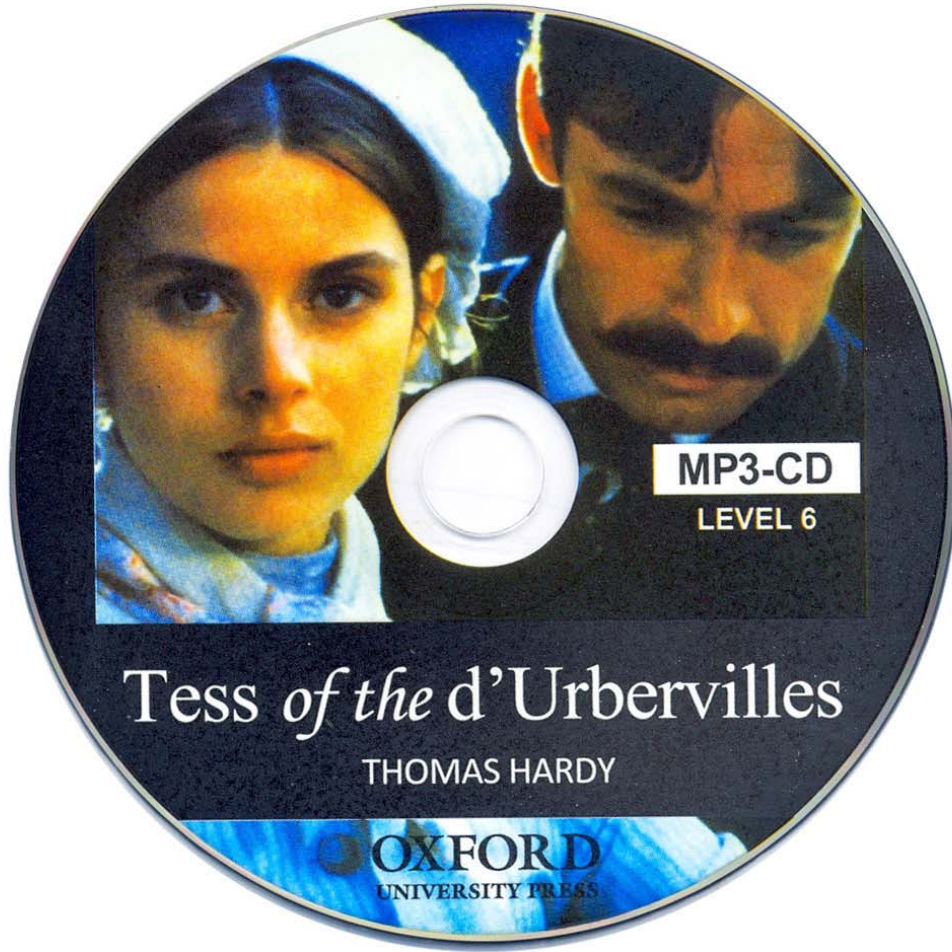
Text adaptation by Clare West

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Tess of the d'Urbervilles

THOMAS HARDY

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TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

Stage 6

First published in 1891, this book is still one of the most sensitive stories we have about the feelings of a young woman.

It is a very sad book: a young girl's life is slowly, but surely, destroyed – not by her enemies, but by the people who say they love her. What kind of love is this that destroys the thing it loves?

The sadness lies in watching the mistakes happen and being unable to stop them. Tess is a girl who overflows with happiness, her life could be so happy – but the right man hesitates, and the wrong man finds her first. 'Don't let her go!' we want to shout, or 'Tell him now, before it's too late!'

But it is already too late: it happened 100 years ago – it happens every day. And we can do nothing but watch as the great world turns, destroys Tess, and turns again . . . as if she had never existed.

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) is one of England's greatest novelists. Most of his work, including *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, is set in his native Dorset, on the south coast of England.



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The Maiden

1

One evening at the end of May a middle-aged man was walking home from Shaston to the village of Marlott in the Vale of Blackmoor. His legs were thin and weak, and he could not walk in a straight line. He had an empty egg-basket on his arm, and his hat was old and worn. After a while he passed an elderly parson riding a grey horse.

'Good night,' said the man with the basket.

'Good night, Sir John,' said the parson.

After another step or two the man stopped and turned round to speak to the parson.

'Now, sir, last market-day we met on this road at the same time, and I said "Good night" and you answered "Good night, Sir John", as you did just now.'

'I did,' said the parson.

'And once before that, almost a month ago.'

'I may have.'

'So why do you call me Sir John, when I am only John Durbeyfield?'

The parson rode nearer, and after a moment's hesitation, explained: 'It was because I've discovered something of historical interest. I am Parson Tringham, the historian. Do you really not know, Durbeyfield, that you are a direct descendant of the ancient and noble family of the d'Urbervilles? They descended from Sir Pagan d'Urberville, who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror in 1066.'

'Never heard that before, sir!'

'Well, it's true. Let me see your face. Yes, you have the

the young women gathered to dance every holiday. For this May-Day dance, all wore white dresses. There was a fine, handsome girl among them, with a red ribbon in her hair. As they danced, they noticed a carriage go by. Durbeyfield lay back in it, singing, 'I'm-Sir-John-and-I've-got-a-spoon-and-seal-and-my-family-lies-at-Kingsbere!' The girl with the ribbon, who was called Tess, turned red and said quickly to her friends, 'Father's tired, that's all.' The other girls just laughed but stopped when Tess looked unhappy. The dancing went on.

In the evening the men of the village came to watch and later to join the dancers. Three young strangers, who were passing by, also stopped to look. They explained they were brothers on a walking tour. The older two continued their walk, but the youngest seemed more interested in the girls than his brothers were, and stayed to dance with several of them. As he left the dance, he noticed Tess, who seemed a little sad that he had not

chosen her. He looked back from the road, and could still see her in her white dress, standing modestly apart from the dancers. He wished he had danced with her. He wished he had asked her name. But it was too late. He hurried on to join his brothers.

The young stranger had made an impression on Tess. But soon, worried by her father's strange appearance that afternoon, she decided to walk home. After the excitement of the dance, her parents' small cottage was a depressing sight. It was dark inside, as they had only one candle. The furniture was old and worn. There were six children crowded into the tiny space. Their mother was doing the washing at the same time as putting the baby to sleep. Looking after so many children had aged Joan Durbeyfield, but she still showed some of her early prettiness, which Tess had inherited.

'Let me help with the washing, mother,' said Tess gently.

'Oh Tess, I'm glad you've come,' said her mother. 'There's something I must tell you.'

'Is it anything to do with father making such a fool of himself this afternoon?' asked Tess, frowning.

'That's all part of the excitement! They've discovered we're the oldest family in the whole county, going back a long way! And our real name is d'Urberville! Doesn't that make you proud! That's why your father rode home in the carriage, not because he'd been drinking, as people thought.'

'I'm glad of that. Will it do us any good, mother?'

'Oh yes! Great things may come of it. No doubt our noble relations will be arriving in their carriages as soon as they find out.'

'Where is father now?' asked Tess suddenly.

Her mother did not answer directly. 'He saw the doctor today, you know. It's fat round the heart, he says. That's the

cause of his illness. He might last ten years . . . might last ten months or days.'

Tess looked anxious. Her father, suddenly a great man, to die so soon! 'But where *is* father?' she asked firmly.

'Now don't you get angry!' said Mrs Durbeyfield. 'The poor man was feeling so weak after the news that he went to Rolliver's. He needs to build up his strength to deliver the beehives tomorrow, remember.'

'Oh my God!' cried Tess. 'He went to a public house! And you agreed to it, mother!'

'No, I didn't,' said Mrs Durbeyfield crossly. 'I've been waiting for you to look after the children while I fetch him.'

Tess knew that her mother greatly looked forward to these trips to Rolliver's. There she could sit by her husband's side among the beer-drinkers, and forget that the children existed. It was one of the few bright moments in her hardworking life. Mrs Durbeyfield went out, and Tess was left with the children. They were very young, and totally dependent on the Durbeyfield couple: six helpless creatures who had not asked to be born at all, much less to be part of the irresponsible Durbeyfield family.

2

It was eleven o'clock before all the family were in bed, and two o'clock next morning was the latest time to set off with the beehives. It was a distance of twenty or thirty miles on bad roads to Casterbridge, where the Saturday market was held. At half-past one Mrs Durbeyfield came into the bedroom where Tess and all the children slept.

'The poor man can't go,' she whispered. Tess sat up in bed. 'But it's late for the bees already. We must take them today.' 'Maybe a young man would go?' asked Mrs Durbeyfield doubtfully. 'One of the ones dancing with you yesterday?'

'Oh no, not for the world!' said Tess proudly. 'And let everybody know the reason? I'd be so ashamed! I think *I* could go if little Abraham came with me.'

Tess and Abraham dressed, led out the old horse Prince with the loaded waggon, and set off in the dark. They cheered themselves up with bread and butter and conversation.

'Tess!' said Abraham, after a silence.

'Yes, Abraham.'

'Aren't you glad that we're a noble family?'

'Not particularly.'

'But you're glad you're going to marry a gentleman?'

'What?' said Tess, lifting her face.

'Our noble relations are going to help you marry a gentleman.'

'Me? Our noble relations? We haven't any. Whatever put that into your head?'

'I heard them talking about it at home. There's a rich lady of our family out at Trantridge, and mother said that if you claimed relationship with her, she'd help you marry a gentleman.'

His sister became suddenly silent. Abraham talked on, not noticing her lack of attention.

'Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?'

'Yes.'

'All like ours?'

'They seem like our apples -- most of them good, a few bad.'

'Which do we live on? A good one or a bad one?'

'A bad one.'

'If we lived on a good one, how would things be different?'



*'Let me give you one little kiss, Tess, and I'll stop!'
said Alec d'Urberville.*

'You made that hat blow off on purpose! You did, didn't you?'

She was silent. He swore angrily at her.

'Don't use such bad words!' cried Tess. 'I shall go back to mother! I hate you!'

D'Urberville suddenly started laughing.

'Look, I promise never to do that again,' he said. 'Come, let me take you in the carriage.'

But she refused, and began to walk in the direction of Trantridge. So they progressed slowly, d'Urberville driving the carriage beside Tess.

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The chickens for which Tess was responsible lived in an old cottage on Mrs d'Urberville's land. On her first day Tess had to take some of the chickens to show to their owner. She immediately realized the old lady was blind. Mrs d'Urberville held each bird and felt it carefully to see that it was in good health. At the end she suddenly asked Tess a question.

'Can you whistle?'

'Whistle, Ma'am?'

'Yes, whistle tunes. I want you to practise and whistle to my birds every day.'

'Yes, Ma'am.'

Tess was not surprised at Mrs d'Urberville's cold manner, and did not expect any more of such a great lady. However, she did not realize that the old lady had never even heard about the family connection.

Tess began to enjoy her new work with the chickens, and the next day in the cottage garden she decided to practise whistling as instructed. She was shocked to find that she had completely forgotten how to whistle. Suddenly she noticed a movement behind a tree near the wall. It was Alec d'Urberville.

'Well, cousin Tess,' he said, 'I've never seen such a beautiful thing as you! I've been watching you from over the wall. Look, I can give you a lesson or two.'

'Oh no you won't!' cried Tess, going back towards the door.

'Don't worry, I won't touch you. Just look . . .' and he showed her how to whistle. From that moment Tess found she could whistle tunes to the birds just as Mrs d'Urberville wanted. And as the weeks passed, she often met d'Urberville in the garden and began to lose her shyness of him.