

SYNOPSIS

Tess of the d'Urberville is basically the story of a country girl, Tess Durbeyfield. At the beginning of the story she is introduced as an innocent sixteen-year-old girl, living in the village of Marlott. Her home is a small house crowded with six children and ruled by a mother and father careless of their responsibilities. Upon learning that they are descended from a noble family, the Durbeyfield send their eldest daughter, Tess, to seek help from the rich Mrs. d'Urberville, whom they believe to be a relative. In fact, there is no kinship, the name has only been assumed. It leads to Tess' acquaintance with the lady's son, Alec, a lustful and cruel young man, who is impressed by her beauty. He offers Tess a job tending fowls on his mother's estate. She agrees to stay there in which several months later Alec succeeds in seducing her.

After a few weeks, she returns to her home, expecting her child. She then bears Alec's son there who dies shortly after birth. For the next year Tess remains at home. Eventually she decides that perhaps she can find happiness if she leaves Marlott. She leaves home once again, this time to work as a dairymaid at the Talbothays Dairy.

At the dairy Tess hopes to lay the foundation for a new life and happens to meet Angel Clare. He is a clergyman's son who is learning about farming through practical experience. Angel is impressed by Tess' freshness and purity. They gradually become interested to each other and Tess is happier than she has ever been.

As their love develops further towards an apparently inevitable marriage, Tess struggles with her conscience, feeling the pressure of society's view that what had happened to her was sinful. She feels ashamed of deceiving Angel by not telling him, but fearful of the consequences if he know.

Finally, Tess tries to confess to Angel by writing a letter which she slips under his door, but the letter goes under the carpet and he never sees it. And it happens until their wedding night, after Angel confesses his youthful misbehavior, that 'Tess' secret emerges. But Angel is shocked and cannot forgive Tess.

Angel then leaves his wife, unable to bring himself to live with the real woman who has replaced the idealized picture he had of her in his mind. He decides to emigrate to Brazil to try his luck on farming. He leaves her money, but it gradually disappears, partly because Tess gives most of it to her family, from whom she keeps

the estrangement secret. She has, therefore, to work and finally ends up toiling in the harsh winter weather at Flintcomb-Ash farm.

Hearing nothing of Angel for a long time, she buries her pride and sets off to visit his family. She reaches the vicarage after a long walk only to hear harsh comments about her made by Angel's brothers. On her return to the farm, she encounters a wandering preacher who turns out to be Alec d'Urberville.

After seeing Tess a few times, Alec renounces his preaching and suggests that Tess will succumb to him once again. Tess writes to Angel imploring him to come home and help her. Upon the death of Tess' father, the Durbeyfields are forced to leave their house, and find no lodging. Alec has offered help to the family, but Tess won't accept.

Having suffered physically and regretted his decision in leaving his wife, Angel returns from Brazil. He is tired but sets out within a few days to find Tess. He, now, finds Tess has, although unwillingly, gone back to Alec who fulfilled his promise to provide for her family. Tess tells him he has come too late and asks him to go away. In bitter anger, Tess murders Alec and then rushes to catch up with Angel. For a brief week Tess finds happiness with Angel. They spend a few blissful days in a deserted mansion, until the police arrest her at Stonehenge and take her away to execution.