

Tess of the d'Urbervilles Summary

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Phase the First: The Maiden

John Durbeyfield Hears About Family Lineage: The story begins with a poor man named John Durbeyfield. He is Tess's father. One day, he is walking back home from work. He is tired as usual. On the way, he meets Parson Tringham, the local clergyman. Tringham stops John and tells him surprising news: the Durbeyfield family is actually descended from an old noble family called the d'Urbervilles. This shocks John because he always thought he was just an ordinary, poor man. Now he starts imagining himself as a gentleman.

Tess's mother, Joan Durbeyfield, is also very excited. She thinks the discovery of their family lineage will change their fortune. She tells Tess about their ancient family name and says this could change their luck. Tess's beauty could be her "trump card" in life. She wants Tess to marry into a rich family. But Tess is not interested in such big dreams. She only wants to help her family. Because their family is poor and they struggle to earn money.

May Day Dance [First Meeting of Tess and Angel]: That evening, in their village, Marlott, there is a May Day dance festival. Tess is there with other girls. Tess is very pretty. She is wearing a white dress with a red ribbon. She loves dancing. During the dance, three brothers pass by—Angel Clare and his two brothers. Angel stops for a while and plays the fiddle for the girls. He notices Tess and thinks she is very pretty. But he does not ask her to dance. He leaves quickly. Tess notices him and feels a little disappointed. This is the first time Tess sees Angel.

The Family Horse (Prince) is Killed in an Accident: The next morning, John is supposed to deliver a load of beehives to the market. But he is too drunk and sick to go. Tess feels responsible. She says she will take the family horse, Prince, and deliver the load with her younger brother, Abraham.

On their way, they talk about life. Abraham, who is just a little boy, asks Tess if the world is a "good" one or a "bad" one. Tess says she thinks it is a "blighted" world. This means the world is damaged and sad.

On the road, both Tess and Abraham become very sleepy. While Tess is asleep, a mail cart comes speeding down the road. It crashes into their cart. This accident killed their horse,

Prince. Tess wakes up to see Prince bleeding heavily, with a large wound in his chest. She cries and tries to stop the blood, but it is too late. This is a terrible shock for Tess. She feels guilty and blames herself for Prince's death. She thinks she should not have fallen asleep.

Prince's death is very important in the story. The horse was the family's only valuable possession. Without it, the Durbeyfields cannot easily earn money. Tess feels she has brought bad luck to her family. This feeling of guilt pushes her to make a big decision: she will go and seek help from the rich d'Urbervilles.

Tess Goes to the d'Urbervilles for Help: Tess's parents think the d'Urbervilles living nearby at Trantridge will help them. Because they think the d'Urbervilles are their "noble relatives." Actually, that rich family at Trantridge is not really d'Urberville. They got the d'Urberville name only by buying it. But the Durbeyfields do not know that.

Tess goes to the d'Urberville house, called The Slopes, to ask for help. There she meets Alec d'Urberville. Alec is a young man with a charming face. But he is a lustful man. He is the son of Simon Stokes, who had bought the noble name "d'Urberville."

Alec Rapes Tess: Alec immediately becomes interested in Tess. He gives her strawberries, roses, and speaks sweetly, but he has bad intentions. Alec offers Tess a job taking care of his mother's birds. Tess accepts because she wants to help her poor family. Alec constantly follows her and flirts with her. He tries to impress her and sometimes behaves rudely.

One day, some women start a fight with Tess in the nearby town. Among them is Car Darch. Car Darch is a former mistress of Alec. She is jealous of Tess because Alec is giving Tess attention. So, Car begins a fight with Tess. Alec rescues Tess. On their way home, Alec takes Tess through a forest named The Chase. As Tess is tired, she falls asleep. Alec takes her into the forest and rapes her. Tess becomes a **"maiden no more."** This moment changes Tess's life forever. She feels ashamed and wronged but keeps silent.

Phase the Second: Maiden No More

Tess Returns Home and Gives Birth to Sorrow: Tess returns home to Marlott. She feels deeply sad. She feels her life is ruined. The neighbours blame Tess for the wrong done to her by Alec. After some time, Tess gives birth to Alec's child, a little boy she names Sorrow. But Sorrow becomes very ill. Tess tries to baptize Sorrow, but no priest agrees to baptize the child. So Tess, crying and feeling alone, baptizes Sorrow herself. Soon after, Sorrow dies. Tess buries the baby in a corner of the churchyard. That corner is for unbaptized children and social outcasts. She decorates his grave with flowers.

After Sorrow's death and burial, Tess feels deeply ashamed of her life in Marlott. Everyone shames her for having a baby without marriage, though it is not her fault. Tess decides to leave Marlott. She wants to start her life again.

Phase the Third: The Rally

[Rally means recover in health or spirit. For Tess, rally means trying to make a new beginning in her life.]

New Life at Talbothays Dairy: Tess goes to find work at Talbothays Dairy. This dairy farm is far from Marlott. When Tess arrives at Talbothays, she finds the surroundings very beautiful. The green fields, cows, and the sound of birds make her feel relaxed for the first time in many months. The people working there are kind, especially the owner, Dairyman Crick. He is a cheerful man. At Talbothays, Tess meets three other milkmaids—Izz Huett, Marian, and Retty Priddle. They quickly became her friends.

Tess Meets Angel Again: At Talbothays, Tess again meets Angel Clare—the same man she had seen once at the May Day dance years earlier. Angel is different from most men Tess knows. He is gentle and intelligent. He talks about books, music, and farming. Angel is also the son of a clergyman, Reverend Clare. He comes from a respectable family. He wants to be a farmer, not a priest, because he likes working with the land.

At first, Angel does not notice Tess as someone special. He is friendly with all the girls. And all the girls—including Izz, Marian, and Retty—like him secretly. But after some time, Angel begins to notice Tess's quiet nature and natural beauty. He sees something pure and honest in her that attracts him strongly. Tess, on the other hand, admires Angel but also fears him. She remembers her past with Alec and feels she is **"not pure"** anymore. In her heart, she thinks she is unworthy of a good man like Angel. She tries to stay away and focus only on her work. But she likes him more and more each day.

When Angel watches Tess work—milking cows, carrying milk, or laughing with the other girls—he feels his heart growing softer toward her. Tess, however, keeps telling herself that she can never marry Angel. She is haunted by her past. She thinks that Angel would hate her if he knew about her past. This fear becomes a heavy burden in Tess's heart.

Phase the Fourth: The Consequence

Angel Proposes to Marry Tess: Angel and Tess spend more and more time together. They wake up early to milk cows, work in the fields, and sometimes talk while carrying milk cans. Angel begins to fall deeply in love with her. He proposes marriage. Tess is shocked. She loves

him, but she refuses his proposal, saying, *"I cannot be your wife."* Angel is confused.

In truth, Tess wants to tell Angel about her past, but she does not have the courage. She keeps thinking of telling him someday soon. Meanwhile, Angel keeps proposing again and again. He hopes Tess will say yes. At last, Tess cannot resist her own heart. She truly loves Angel and wants to be with him. She decides to accept his proposal.

Wedding Preparations: Angel wants to marry on the last day of the year. Tess agrees. Angel buys Tess a wedding dress, gloves, and a handkerchief. Tess worries about wearing white because it symbolizes purity. She feels like Queen Guinevere, whose dress changed color to reveal her guilt. She is full of anxiety about omens and curses. But she keeps quiet.

On Christmas Eve, Angel and Tess go to town for a date. There, they meet two men from Trantridge. One of them insults Tess. That man remembers Tess's past with Alec. Angel angrily punches him. Tess is scared and asks to delay the wedding, but Angel refuses.

Tess Writes a Letter to Tell Angel About Her Past: Tess writes a letter to Angel. In the letter, she confesses everything about her past with Alec and the baby, Sorrow. Late at night, she slips the letter under Angel's door. But the letter accidentally slides under the carpet. Angel never sees it.

The next morning, Angel behaves as if nothing had happened. Because he has not read the letter. Tess thinks he has read it and forgiven her. She feels relieved but also worried. She decides she will tell him everything after the wedding.

Wedding Day & Bad Omens: They marry on New Year's Eve. No one from Angel's family comes because they do not support the match. Tess's family also does not attend. A rooster crows three times in the afternoon. This is considered to be a bad omen. Tess feels uneasy, but Angel laughs it off.

They go to a house for their wedding night. It is an old d'Urberville mansion, with portraits of Tess's ancestors on the walls. Angel gives Tess beautiful jewels from his godmother. Tess looks like a noble lady when she wears them. But she also feels uncomfortable, as if she is wearing another person's life.

Angel's Confession: Angel decides to confess something. He says that before meeting Tess, he had spent two days with a woman and had sex. Tess forgives him. She says she loves him regardless. Now, Tess tells him about Alec and how she lost her virginity before marriage and had a child.

Phase the Fifth: The Woman Pays

Angel's Harsh Reaction: Angel's reaction is shocking. First, he cannot believe it. Then he says she is **"another woman"** and no longer the one he married. He says he loves her, but he cannot accept her as his wife anymore. Tess is shocked and hurt.

Angel says society cannot accept a woman who is not pure. He says, **"In the eyes of the world, you are not the same woman I married this morning."** Tess tries to explain that she was innocent and that Alec had taken advantage of her. But Angel cannot change his mind. They spend the night apart in the same house. Tess feels ashamed and helpless. Angel decides to go to Brazil to farm. The next morning, Tess says she will go away to live with her parents. She says she will work hard and support herself and her family. Angel says he will give her money to start a new life. He says they cannot live together as husband and wife. Tess quietly accepts.

The Sleepwalking Scene: One night, Angel is walking in his sleep. He enters Tess's room, lifts her gently, and carries her outside. He walks toward a churchyard, all while still asleep. Tess is frightened but does not wake him. Angel gently lays her down in an empty stone coffin and says, "Dead, dead, dead!" It is as if he sees their marriage as dead. Then he carries her back to the house and goes to bed, still asleep.

Tess Returns to Her Family: Tess returns home to Marlott. Her parents are surprised and upset to see her alone. They learn Angel has gone to Brazil to start a farming project. Tess tells them she does not want to depend on Angel and will find work. The villagers gossip about her because she returned so soon after marriage. Tess feels humiliated. She tells her mother she should have confessed to Angel before the wedding, but Joan says, "You did what most women do. Men are different—they never forgive."

The Family Becomes Homeless: Tess's father, John, drinks heavily and soon dies of heart problems. Because of his death, the family loses their cottage. They have nowhere to go. They pack their belongings and travel in a wagon. Tess feels miserable because she wants to have a good life. But she is now even poorer than before.

Tess Goes to Flintcomb-Ash: Tess finds harsh work at a farm called Flintcomb-Ash. The farm is bleak, cold, and joyless. There she meets and works with Marian and Izz. The three women do backbreaking work, such as threshing turnips in freezing weather. Now, Tess dresses plainly. She even makes herself look ugly to avoid attention from men. She covers her face and cuts her eyebrows. At Flintcomb-Ash, the work is brutal and the conditions are harsh. But Tess stays because she wants to earn honestly. She does not want to depend on Angel's money.

Angel in Brazil: Meanwhile, Angel Clare is in Brazil. Life there is very hard. The weather is bad, crops fail, and Angel gets sick. He also suffers emotionally. He realizes that he abandoned Tess even though she had forgiven him so easily for his sin. Angel begins to see that Tess is truly a “pure woman.” He regrets leaving her.

Phase the Sixth: The Convert

Alec Returns: One day, while Tess is working at Flintcomb-Ash, she meets Alec d’Urberville again. But now, Alec has become a preacher (religious man/priest). He is converted by Angel’s own father, Reverend Clare. Alec tells Tess he has changed his life. Tess is shocked and angry. She tells him to stay away from her because he ruined her life. Alec promises never to bother her again.

But when Alec sees how poor and hopeless Tess is, he slowly falls back into his old ways. He stops preaching and begins to follow Tess. He tries to convince her to live with him.

Tess’s Struggle and Desperation: Tess’s life becomes harder. Her family is homeless, and her siblings are hungry. Alec uses this opportunity to tempt Tess. He says that he can provide a home and food if she lives with him as his mistress. Tess resists, but she also feels trapped.

Tess writes a desperate letter to Angel. She begs him to come back and save her from Alec. She says she still loves him and will always be faithful if he returns. But Angel, still recovering in Brazil, does not see the letter in time.

Alec keeps pressing her. He says Angel will never return. Tess is torn between loyalty to Angel and the immediate need to help her starving family.

Tess Becomes Alec’s Mistress: Finally, Tess gives in to Alec—not because she loves him, but because she is desperate to feed and shelter her family. She becomes Alec’s mistress. This moment is often called Tess’s **“fall from the frying pan into the fire.”** She went from one bad situation (poverty and judgment) into an even worse one (living with the man who had ruined her life before). Tess is betrayed by fate, by society’s double standards, and by Angel’s earlier cruelty.

Angel Comes Back to England: Angel Clare finally comes back from Brazil. He is thin, pale, and sick-looking. While in Brazil, he often thought about Tess. He remembered how she forgave him so easily when he confessed his sin, but he did not. The longer he stayed away, the more guilty he felt. One day in Brazil, an older farmer told Angel he was wrong to leave Tess. Because a good woman is worth more than any “social rule.” This advice, along with Angel’s own regret, made him decide to return to England and find Tess.

Tess Living With Alec: While Angel is traveling back, Tess is still living with Alec d'Urberville at Sandbourne, a fashionable seaside town. Alec again becomes his old self—rich, controlling, and proud. He keeps Tess in nice clothes and a comfortable house. But Tess is deeply unhappy. She does not love Alec. She lives with him only because she feels trapped and wants to help her homeless family.

Sometimes Tess bursts out in anger at Alec. She tells him that he has ruined her life twice—first when he took advantage of her innocence, and now by keeping her away from her true husband. Alec feels guilty for a moment, but then says Angel will never come back. Tess writes one more letter to Angel. In the letter, she begs him to come quickly, or she might commit suicide.

Phase the Seventh: Fulfilment

Angel Finds Tess: Angel reaches England. He feels deep pain and regret. He tries to find Tess. He writes to Tess's mother, Joan, and later meets her. Angel asks where Tess is. Joan is at first reluctant to tell him. She says they are doing fine and don't need money. Angel insists he must see Tess. Finally, Joan tells him Tess is in Sandbourne, but she does not know the exact address.

Angel goes to Sandbourne. When he finally sees Tess, he is shocked. She is beautifully dressed, with soft white hands that no longer show signs of hard farm work. Tess looks rich and elegant. Angel tells her he has come back to love her, take her home, and make things right. But Tess says in a quiet, sad voice: "It is too late."

Tess says she waited for Angel, wrote to him, begged him to come, but he never came. She was alone, poor, and desperate. Then, Alec gave her food, shelter, and help for her family, and in return, she agreed to live with him. She says she does not deserve Angel anymore. Angel is stunned. He tries to talk to her more, but she walks away. Angel is heartbroken and confused.

Tess's Outburst Against Alec: Back at the lodging house, Tess is furious at Alec. She shouts at him. She says he has destroyed her happiness forever. She says Alec has taken advantage of Tess's poor condition. So, she cannot return to her love, her husband, Angel, now. She has lost Angel because of Alec. Their landlady, Mrs. Brooks, overhears everything through the keyhole. She is shocked by Tess's pain.

The Murder of Alec: Shortly after Angel leaves, Mrs. Brooks sees something strange: a big red stain on her ceiling. The stain is shaped like a heart. She realizes it is blood dripping from the room above (Tess and Alec's room). She finds that Alec d'Urberville has been stabbed to the heart and is dead. The whole house is in chaos as people gather. A doctor confirms that

Alec is dead from a single knife wound.

Tess Meets Angel Again: Angel, still in shock and wandering the streets, suddenly sees Tess running after him. She looks wild and desperate but also strangely calm. She tells him she has killed Alec. She says she forgives Angel for leaving her.

Angel is horrified that she is now a murderer. But at the same time, he is touched that she did it because of her love for him. He promises he will not leave her and will protect her as long as he can.

Their Short Escape: Angel and Tess spend five days together. They hide in a vacant house. These are the happiest days Tess has had in a long time. But Tess knows the police will catch her. She tells Angel that happiness cannot last for them. Angel briefly suggests they could escape by ship to another country. But Tess says it is useless. She knows she must face her punishment.

Stonehenge Scene: One night, they wander across the countryside and reach Stonehenge. Stonehenge is an ancient stone monument. Tess is tired and lies down on a flat stone. Angel thinks the stone might have been used as an altar in ancient times.

Before falling asleep, Tess makes one last request: when she is gone, Angel should marry her younger sister, Liza-Lu. Tess also asks if he thinks they will meet after death, but Angel remains silent. Tess falls asleep peacefully.

The Arrest: While Tess is sleeping, police officers come. Angel begs them not to wake her yet. When Tess wakes up, she sees the officers and calmly says she is ready to go. She says happiness could never have lasted for her and Angel. The officers take her away to prison. Angel watches helplessly. He knows it is the last time he will see her free.

Tess's Execution and Aftermath: A few days later, Tess is executed/killed by hanging in Wintonchester prison. A black flag is raised on the prison building. The black flag is a signal that a death sentence has been carried out. Outside, Angel and Tess's sister Liza-Lu hold hands. They are both heartbroken. They slowly walk away together, starting a quiet, uncertain future. The narrator ends by saying: **“‘Justice’ was done.”** But the tone makes it clear that what happened to Tess was not justice at all.