THOMAS HARDY

THE WOODLANDERS

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

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Thomas Hardy

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Thomas Hardy – A Biographical Primer

English novelist, was born in Dorsetshire on the 2nd of June 1840. His family was one of the branches of the Dorset Hardys, formerly of influence in and near the valley of the Frome, claiming descent of John Le Hardy of Jersey (son of Clement Le Hardy, lieutenant-governor of that island in 1488), who settled in the west of England. His maternal ancestors were the Swetman, Childs or Child, and kindred families, who before and after 1635 were small landed proprietors in Melbury Osmond, Dorset, and adjoining parishes. He was educated at local schools, 1848–1854, and afterwards privately, and in 1856 was articled to Mr. John Hicks, an ecclesiastical architect of Dorchester. In 1859 he began writing verse and essays, but in 1861 was compelled to apply himself more strictly to architecture, sketching and measuring many old Dorset churches with a view to their restoration. In 1862 he went to London (which he had first visited at the age of nine) and became assistant to the late Sir Arthur Blomfield, R.A. In 1863 he won the medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects for an essay on Coloured Brick and Terra-cotta Architecture, and in the same year won the prize of the Architectural

Association for design. In March 1965 his first short story was published in Chamber's Journal, and during the next two or three years he wrote a great deal of verse, being somewhat uncertain whether to take to architecture or to literature as a profession. In 1867 he left London for Weymouth, and during that and the following year wrote a "purpose" story, which in 1869 was accepted by Messrs Chapman and Hall. The manuscript had been read by Mr. George Meredith, who asked the writer to call on him, and advised him not to print it, but to try another, with more plot. The manuscript was withdrawn and re-written, but never published. In 1870 Mr. Hardy took Mr. Meredith's advice too literally, and constructed a novel that was all plot, which was published under the title Desperate Remedies. In 1872 appeared Under the Greenwood Tree, "a rural painting of the Dutch school," in which Mr. Hardy had already "found himself," and which he has never surpassed in happy and delicate perfection of art. A Pair of Blue Eyes, in which tragedy and irony come into his work together, was published in 1873. In 1874 Mr. Hardy married Emma Lavinia, daughter of the late T. Attersoll Gifford of Plymouth. His first popular success was made by Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), which, on its appearance anonymously in the Cornhill Magazine, was attributed by many to George Eliot. Then came The Hand of Ethelberta (1876), described, not inaptly, as "a comedy in chapters"; The Return of the Native (1878), the most sombre and, in some ways, the most powerful and characteristic of Mr. Hardy's novels; The Trumpet-Major (1880); A Laodicean (1881); Two on a Tower (1882), a long excursion in constructive irony; The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886); The Woodlanders (1887); Wessex Tales (1888); A Group of Noble Dames (1891); Tess of the D' Urbervilles (1891), Mr. Hardy's most famous novel; Life's Little Ironies (1894); Jude the Obscure (1895), his most thoughtful and least popular book; The Well-Beloved, a reprint, with some

revision, of a story originally published in the Illustrated London News in 1892 (1897); Wessex Poems, written during the previous thirty years, with illustrations by the author; and The Dynasts (2 parts, 1904–1906). In 1909 appeared Time's Laughing-stocks and other Verses. In all his works Mr. Hardy is concerned with one thing, seen under two aspects; not civilizations, nor manners, but the principle of life itself, invisibly realized in humanity as sex, seen visibly in the world as what we call nature. He is a fatalist, perhaps rather a determinist, and he studies the workings of fate or law (ruling through inexorable moods or humours), in the chief vivifying and disturbing influence in life, women. His view of women is more French than English; it is subtle, a little cruel, not as tolerant as it seems, thoroughly a man's point of view, and not, as with Mr. Meredith, man's and woman's at once. He sees all that is irresponsible for good and evil in a woman's character, all that is untrustworthy in her brain and will, all that is alluring in her variability. He is her apologist, but always with a reserve of private judgment. No one has created more attractive women of a certain class, women whom a man would have been more likely to love or regret loving. In his earlier books he is somewhat careful over the reputation of his heroines; gradually, he allows them more liberty, with a franker treatment of instinct and its consequence. Jude the Obscure is perhaps the most unbiased consideration in English fiction of the more complicated question of sex. There is almost no passion in his work, neither the author nor his characters ever seeming to pass beyond the state of curiosity, the most intellectually interesting of limitations, under the influence of any emotion. In his feeling for nature, curiosity sometimes seems to broaden into a more intimate communion. The heath, the village with its peasants, the change of every hour among the fields and on the roads of that English countryside which he made his own—the

Dorsetshire and Wiltshire “Wessex”—mean more to him, in a sense, than even the spectacle of man and woman in their blind and painful and absorbing struggle for existence. His knowledge of woman confirms him in a suspension of judgment; his knowledge of nature brings him nearer to the unchanging and consoling element in the world. All the entertainment which he gets out of life comes to him from his contemplation of the peasant, as himself a rooted part of the earth, translating the dumbness of the fields into humour. His peasants have been compared with Shakespeare’s; he has the Shakesperean sense of their placid vegetation by the side of hurrying animal life, to which they act the part of chorus, with an unconscious wisdom in their close, narrow and undistracted view of things. The order of merit was conferred upon Mr. Hardy in July 1910.

The Woodlanders

CHAPTER I.

The rambler who, for old association or other reasons, should trace the forsaken coach-road running almost in a meridional line from Bristol to the south shore of England, would find himself during the latter half of his journey in the vicinity of some extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple-orchards. Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing, as the case may be, make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade, stretching over the road with easeful horizontality, as if they found the unsubstantial air an adequate support for their limbs. At one place, where a hill is crossed, the largest of the woods shows itself bisected by

the high-way, as the head of thick hair is bisected by the white line of its parting. The spot is lonely.

The physiognomy of a deserted highway expresses solitude to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. The contrast of what is with what might be probably accounts for this. To step, for instance, at the place under notice, from the hedge of the plantation into the adjoining pale thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn.

At this spot, on the lowering evening of a by-gone winter's day, there stood a man who had entered upon the scene much in the aforesaid manner. Alighting into the road from a stile hard by, he, though by no means a "chosen vessel" for impressions, was temporarily influenced by some such feeling of being suddenly more alone than before he had emerged upon the highway.

It could be seen by a glance at his rather finical style of dress that he did not belong to the country proper; and from his air, after a while, that though there might be a sombre beauty in the scenery, music in the breeze, and a wan procession of coaching ghosts in the sentiment of this old turnpike-road, he was mainly puzzled about the way. The dead men's work that had been expended in climbing that hill, the blistered soles that had trodden it, and the tears that had wetted it, were not his concern; for fate had given him no time for any but practical things.

He looked north and south, and mechanically prodded the ground with his walking-stick. A closer glance at his face corroborated the testimony of his clothes. It was self-

complacent, yet there was small apparent ground for such complacence. Nothing irradiated it; to the eye of the magician in character, if not to the ordinary observer, the expression enthroned there was absolute submission to and belief in a little assortment of forms and habitudes.

At first not a soul appeared who could enlighten him as he desired, or seemed likely to appear that night. But presently a slight noise of laboring wheels and the steady dig of a horse's shoe-tips became audible; and there loomed in the notch of the hill and plantation that the road formed here at the summit a carrier's van drawn by a single horse. When it got nearer, he said, with some relief to himself, "'Tis Mrs. Dollery's—this will help me."

The vehicle was half full of passengers, mostly women. He held up his stick at its approach, and the woman who was driving drew rein.

"I've been trying to find a short way to Little Hintock this last half-hour, Mrs. Dollery," he said. "But though I've been to Great Hintock and Hintock House half a dozen times I am at fault about the small village. You can help me, I dare say?"

She assured him that she could—that as she went to Great Hintock her van passed near it—that it was only up the lane that branched out of the lane into which she was about to turn—just ahead. "Though," continued Mrs. Dollery, "'tis such a little small place that, as a town gentleman, you'd need have a candle and lantern to find it if ye don't know where 'tis. Bedad! I wouldn't live there if they'd pay me to. Now at Great Hintock you do see the world a bit."

He mounted and sat beside her, with his feet outside, where they were ever and anon brushed over by the horse's

tail.

This van, driven and owned by Mrs. Dollery, was rather a movable attachment of the roadway than an extraneous object, to those who knew it well. The old horse, whose hair was of the roughness and color of heather, whose leg-joints, shoulders, and hoofs were distorted by harness and drudgery from colthood—though if all had their rights, he ought, symmetrical in outline, to have been picking the herbage of some Eastern plain instead of tugging here—had trodden this road almost daily for twenty years. Even his subjection was not made congruous throughout, for the harness being too short, his tail was not drawn through the crupper, so that the breeching slipped awkwardly to one side. He knew every subtle incline of the seven or eight miles of ground between Hintock and Sherton Abbas—the market-town to which he journeyed—as accurately as any surveyor could have learned it by a Dumpy level.

The vehicle had a square black tilt which nodded with the motion of the wheels, and at a point in it over the driver's head was a hook to which the reins were hitched at times, when they formed a catenary curve from the horse's shoulders. Somewhere about the axles was a loose chain, whose only known purpose was to clink as it went. Mrs. Dollery, having to hop up and down many times in the service of her passengers, wore, especially in windy weather, short leggings under her gown for modesty's sake, and instead of a bonnet a felt hat tied down with a handkerchief, to guard against an earache to which she was frequently subject. In the rear of the van was a glass window, which she cleaned with her pocket-handkerchief every market-day before starting. Looking at the van from the back, the spectator could thus see through its interior a square piece of the same sky and landscape that he saw without, but intruded on by the profiles of the seated

passengers, who, as they rumbled onward, their lips moving and heads nodding in animated private converse, remained in happy unconsciousness that their mannerisms and facial peculiarities were sharply defined to the public eye.

This hour of coming home from market was the happy one, if not the happiest, of the week for them. Snugly ensconced under the tilt, they could forget the sorrows of the world without, and survey life and recapitulate the incidents of the day with placid smiles.

The passengers in the back part formed a group to themselves, and while the new-comer spoke to the proprietress, they indulged in a confidential chat about him as about other people, which the noise of the van rendered inaudible to himself and Mrs. Dollery, sitting forward.

"'Tis Barber Percombe—he that's got the waxen woman in his window at the top of Abbey Street," said one. "What business can bring him from his shop out here at this time and not a journeyman hair-cutter, but a master-barber that's left off his pole because 'tis not genteel!"

They listened to his conversation, but Mr. Percombe, though he had nodded and spoken genially, seemed indisposed to gratify the curiosity which he had aroused; and the unrestrained flow of ideas which had animated the inside of the van before his arrival was checked thenceforward.

Thus they rode on till they turned into a half-invisible little lane, whence, as it reached the verge of an eminence, could be discerned in the dusk, about half a mile to the right, gardens and orchards sunk in a concave, and, as it were, snipped out of the woodland. From this self-contained place

rose in stealthy silence tall stems of smoke, which the eye of imagination could trace downward to their root on quiet hearth-stones festooned overhead with hams and flitches. It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more passivity than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, no less than in other places, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein.

This place was the Little Hintock of the master-barber's search. The coming night gradually obscured the smoke of the chimneys, but the position of the sequestered little world could still be distinguished by a few faint lights, winking more or less ineffectually through the leafless boughs, and the undiscerned songsters they bore, in the form of balls of feathers, at roost among them.

Out of the lane followed by the van branched a yet smaller lane, at the corner of which the barber alighted, Mrs. Dollery's van going on to the larger village, whose superiority to the despised smaller one as an exemplar of the world's movements was not particularly apparent in its means of approach.

"A very clever and learned young doctor, who, they say, is in league with the devil, lives in the place you be going to—not because there's anybody for'n to cure there, but because 'tis the middle of his district."

The observation was flung at the barber by one of the women at parting, as a last attempt to get at his errand that way.

But he made no reply, and without further pause the pedestrian plunged towards the umbrageous nook, and paced cautiously over the dead leaves which nearly buried the road or street of the hamlet. As very few people except themselves passed this way after dark, a majority of the denizens of Little Hintock deemed window-curtains unnecessary; and on this account Mr. Percombe made it his business to stop opposite the casements of each cottage that he came to, with a demeanor which showed that he was endeavoring to conjecture, from the persons and things he observed within, the whereabouts of somebody or other who resided here.

Only the smaller dwellings interested him; one or two houses, whose size, antiquity, and rambling appurtenances signified that notwithstanding their remoteness they must formerly have been, if they were not still, inhabited by people of a certain social standing, being neglected by him entirely. Smells of pomace, and the hiss of fermenting cider, which reached him from the back quarters of other tenements, revealed the recent occupation of some of the inhabitants, and joined with the scent of decay from the perishing leaves underfoot.

Half a dozen dwellings were passed without result. The next, which stood opposite a tall tree, was in an exceptional state of radiance, the flickering brightness from the inside shining up the chimney and making a luminous mist of the emerging smoke. The interior, as seen through the window, caused him to draw up with a terminative air and watch. The house was rather large for a cottage, and the door, which opened immediately into the living-room, stood ajar, so that a ribbon of light fell through the opening into the dark atmosphere without. Every now and then a moth, decrepit from the late season, would flit for a moment

across the out-coming rays and disappear again into the night.

CHAPTER II.

In the room from which this cheerful blaze proceeded, he beheld a girl seated on a willow chair, and busily occupied by the light of the fire, which was ample and of wood. With a bill-hook in one hand and a leather glove, much too large for her, on the other, she was making spars, such as are used by thatchers, with great rapidity. She wore a leather apron for this purpose, which was also much too large for her figure. On her left hand lay a bundle of the straight, smooth sticks called spar-gads—the raw material of her manufacture; on her right, a heap of chips and ends—the refuse—with which the fire was maintained; in front, a pile of the finished articles. To produce them she took up each gad, looked critically at it from end to end, cut it to length, split it into four, and sharpened each of the quarters with dexterous blows, which brought it to a triangular point precisely resembling that of a bayonet.

Beside her, in case she might require more light, a brass candlestick stood on a little round table, curiously formed of an old coffin-stool, with a deal top nailed on, the white surface of the latter contrasting oddly with the black carved oak of the substructure. The social position of the household in the past was almost as definitively shown by the presence of this article as that of an esquire or nobleman by his old helmets or shields. It had been customary for every well-to-do villager, whose tenure was by copy of court-roll, or in any way more permanent than that of the mere cotter, to keep a pair of these stools for the use of his own dead; but for the last generation or two a

feeling of cui bono had led to the discontinuance of the custom, and the stools were frequently made use of in the manner described.

The young woman laid down the bill-hook for a moment and examined the palm of her right hand, which, unlike the other, was ungloved, and showed little hardness or roughness about it. The palm was red and blistering, as if this present occupation were not frequent enough with her to subdue it to what it worked in. As with so many right hands born to manual labor, there was nothing in its fundamental shape to bear out the physiological conventionalism that gradations of birth, gentle or mean, show themselves primarily in the form of this member. Nothing but a cast of the die of destiny had decided that the girl should handle the tool; and the fingers which clasped the heavy ash haft might have skilfully guided the pencil or swept the string, had they only been set to do it in good time.

Her face had the usual fulness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude. Where the eyes of a multitude beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its individuality; but in the still water of privacy every tentacle of feeling and sentiment shoots out in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a child's look by an intruder. In years she was no more than nineteen or twenty, but the necessity of taking thought at a too early period of life had forced the provisional curves of her childhood's face to a premature finality. Thus she had but little pretension to beauty, save in one prominent particular —her hair. Its abundance made it almost unmanageable; its color was, roughly speaking, and as seen here by firelight, brown, but careful notice, or an observation by day, would have revealed that its true shade was a rare and beautiful approximation to chestnut.

On this one bright gift of Time to the particular victim of his now before us the new-comer's eyes were fixed; meanwhile the fingers of his right hand mechanically played over something sticking up from his waistcoat-pocket—the bows of a pair of scissors, whose polish made them feebly responsive to the light within. In her present beholder's mind the scene formed by the girlish spar-maker composed itself into a post-Raffaelite picture of extremest quality, wherein the girl's hair alone, as the focus of observation, was depicted with intensity and distinctness, and her face, shoulders, hands, and figure in general, being a blurred mass of unimportant detail lost in haze and obscurity.

He hesitated no longer, but tapped at the door and entered. The young woman turned at the crunch of his boots on the sanded floor, and exclaiming, "Oh, Mr. Percombe, how you frightened me!" quite lost her color for a moment.

He replied, "You should shut your door—then you'd hear folk open it."

"I can't," she said; "the chimney smokes so. Mr. Percombe, you look as unnatural out of your shop as a canary in a thorn-hedge. Surely you have not come out here on my account—for—"

"Yes—to have your answer about this." He touched her head with his cane, and she winced. "Do you agree?" he continued. "It is necessary that I should know at once, as the lady is soon going away, and it takes time to make up."

"Don't press me—it worries me. I was in hopes you had thought no more of it. I can NOT part with it—so there!"

"Now, look here, Marty," said the barber, sitting down on the coffin-stool table. "How much do you get for making these spars?"

"Hush—father's up-stairs awake, and he don't know that I am doing his work."

"Well, now tell me," said the man, more softly. "How much do you get?"

"Eighteenpence a thousand," she said, reluctantly.

"Who are you making them for?"

"Mr. Melbury, the timber-dealer, just below here."

"And how many can you make in a day?"

"In a day and half the night, three bundles—that's a thousand and a half."

"Two and threepence." The barber paused. "Well, look here," he continued, with the remains of a calculation in his tone, which calculation had been the reduction to figures of the probable monetary magnetism necessary to overpower the resistant force of her present purse and the woman's love of comeliness, "here's a sovereign—a gold sovereign, almost new." He held it out between his finger and thumb. "That's as much as you'd earn in a week and a half at that rough man's work, and it's yours for just letting me snip off what you've got too much of."

The girl's bosom moved a very little. "Why can't the lady send to some other girl who don't value her hair—not to me?" she exclaimed.

"Why, simpleton, because yours is the exact shade of her own, and 'tis a shade you can't match by dyeing. But you are not going to refuse me now I've come all the way from Sherton o' purpose?"

"I say I won't sell it—to you or anybody."

"Now listen," and he drew up a little closer beside her. "The lady is very rich, and won't be particular to a few shillings; so I will advance to this on my own responsibility—I'll make the one sovereign two, rather than go back empty-handed."

"No, no, no!" she cried, beginning to be much agitated. "You are a-tempting me, Mr. Percombe. You go on like the Devil to Dr. Faustus in the penny book. But I don't want your money, and won't agree. Why did you come? I said when you got me into your shop and urged me so much, that I didn't mean to sell my hair!" The speaker was hot and stern.

"Marty, now hearken. The lady that wants it wants it badly. And, between you and me, you'd better let her have it. 'Twill be bad for you if you don't."

"Bad for me? Who is she, then?"

The barber held his tongue, and the girl repeated the question.

"I am not at liberty to tell you. And as she is going abroad soon it makes no difference who she is at all."

"She wants it to go abroad wi'?"

Percombe assented by a nod. The girl regarded him reflectively. "Barber Percombe," she said, "I know who 'tis.

'Tis she at the House—Mrs. Charmond!"

"That's my secret. However, if you agree to let me have it, I'll tell you in confidence."

"I'll certainly not let you have it unless you tell me the truth. It is Mrs. Charmond."

The barber dropped his voice. "Well—it is. You sat in front of her in church the other day, and she noticed how exactly your hair matched her own. Ever since then she's been hankering for it, and at last decided to get it. As she won't wear it till she goes off abroad, she knows nobody will recognize the change. I'm commissioned to get it for her, and then it is to be made up. I shouldn't have vamped all these miles for any less important employer. Now, mind —'tis as much as my business with her is worth if it should be known that I've let out her name; but honor between us two, Marty, and you'll say nothing that would injure me?"

"I don't wish to tell upon her," said Marty, coolly. "But my hair is my own, and I'm going to keep it."

"Now, that's not fair, after what I've told you," said the nettled barber. "You see, Marty, as you are in the same parish, and in one of her cottages, and your father is ill, and wouldn't like to turn out, it would be as well to oblige her. I say that as a friend. But I won't press you to make up your mind to-night. You'll be coming to market to-morrow, I dare say, and you can call then. If you think it over you'll be inclined to bring what I want, I know."

"I've nothing more to say," she answered.

Her companion saw from her manner that it was useless to urge her further by speech. "As you are a trusty young

woman," he said, "I'll put these sovereigns up here for ornament, that you may see how handsome they are. Bring the hair to-morrow, or return the sovereigns." He stuck them edgewise into the frame of a small mantle looking-glass. "I hope you'll bring it, for your sake and mine. I should have thought she could have suited herself elsewhere; but as it's her fancy it must be indulged if possible. If you cut it off yourself, mind how you do it so as to keep all the locks one way." He showed her how this was to be done.

"But I sha'nt," she replied, with laconic indifference. "I value my looks too much to spoil 'em. She wants my hair to get another lover with; though if stories are true she's broke the heart of many a noble gentleman already."

"Lord, it's wonderful how you guess things, Marty," said the barber. "I've had it from them that know that there certainly is some foreign gentleman in her eye. However, mind what I ask."

"She's not going to get him through me."

Percombe had retired as far as the door; he came back, planted his cane on the coffin-stool, and looked her in the face. "Marty South," he said, with deliberate emphasis, "YOU'VE GOT A LOVER YOURSELF, and that's why you won't let it go!"

She reddened so intensely as to pass the mild blush that suffices to heighten beauty; she put the yellow leather glove on one hand, took up the hook with the other, and sat down doggedly to her work without turning her face to him again. He regarded her head for a moment, went to the door, and with one look back at her, departed on his way homeward.

Marty pursued her occupation for a few minutes, then suddenly laying down the bill-hook, she jumped up and went to the back of the room, where she opened a door which disclosed a staircase so whitely scrubbed that the grain of the wood was wellnigh sodden away by such cleansing. At the top she gently approached a bedroom, and without entering, said, "Father, do you want anything?"

A weak voice inside answered in the negative; adding, "I should be all right by to-morrow if it were not for the tree!"

"The tree again—always the tree! Oh, father, don't worry so about that. You know it can do you no harm."

"Who have ye had talking to ye down-stairs?"

"A Sherton man called—nothing to trouble about," she said, soothingly. "Father," she went on, "can Mrs. Charmond turn us out of our house if she's minded to?"

"Turn us out? No. Nobody can turn us out till my poor soul is turned out of my body. 'Tis life-hold, like Ambrose Winterborne's. But when my life drops 'twill be hers—not till then." His words on this subject so far had been rational and firm enough. But now he lapsed into his moaning strain: "And the tree will do it—that tree will soon be the death of me."

"Nonsense, you know better. How can it be?" She refrained from further speech, and descended to the ground-floor again.

"Thank Heaven, then," she said to herself, "what belongs to me I keep."

CHAPTER III.

The lights in the village went out, house after house, till there only remained two in the darkness. One of these came from a residence on the hill-side, of which there is nothing to say at present; the other shone from the window of Marty South. Precisely the same outward effect was produced here, however, by her rising when the clock struck ten and hanging up a thick cloth curtain. The door it was necessary to keep ajar in hers, as in most cottages, because of the smoke; but she obviated the effect of the ribbon of light through the chink by hanging a cloth over that also. She was one of those people who, if they have to work harder than their neighbors, prefer to keep the necessity a secret as far as possible; and but for the slight sounds of wood-splintering which came from within, no wayfarer would have perceived that here the cottager did not sleep as elsewhere.

Eleven, twelve, one o'clock struck; the heap of spars grew higher, and the pile of chips and ends more bulky. Even the light on the hill had now been extinguished; but still she worked on. When the temperature of the night without had fallen so low as to make her chilly, she opened a large blue umbrella to ward off the draught from the door. The two sovereigns confronted her from the looking-glass in such a manner as to suggest a pair of jaundiced eyes on the watch for an opportunity. Whenever she sighed for weariness she lifted her gaze towards them, but withdrew it quickly, stroking her tresses with her fingers for a moment, as if to assure herself that they were still secure. When the clock struck three she arose and tied up the spars she had last made in a bundle resembling those that lay against the wall.

She wrapped round her a long red woollen cravat and opened the door. The night in all its fulness met her flatly on the threshold, like the very brink of an absolute void, or the antemundane Ginnung-Gap believed in by her Teuton forefathers. For her eyes were fresh from the blaze, and here there was no street-lamp or lantern to form a kindly transition between the inner glare and the outer dark. A lingering wind brought to her ear the creaking sound of two over-crowded branches in the neighboring wood which were rubbing each other into wounds, and other vocalized sorrows of the trees, together with the screech of owls, and the fluttering tumble of some awkward wood-pigeon ill-balanced on its roosting-bough.

But the pupils of her young eyes soon expanded, and she could see well enough for her purpose. Taking a bundle of spars under each arm, and guided by the serrated line of tree-tops against the sky, she went some hundred yards or more down the lane till she reached a long open shed, carpeted around with the dead leaves that lay about everywhere. Night, that strange personality, which within walls brings ominous introspectiveness and self-distrust, but under the open sky banishes such subjective anxieties as too trivial for thought, inspired Marty South with a less perturbed and brisker manner now. She laid the spars on the ground within the shed and returned for more, going to and fro till her whole manufactured stock were deposited here.

This erection was the wagon-house of the chief man of business hereabout, Mr. George Melbury, the timber, bark, and copse-ware merchant for whom Marty's father did work of this sort by the piece. It formed one of the many rambling out-houses which surrounded his dwelling, an equally irregular block of building, whose immense

chimneys could just be discerned even now. The four huge wagons under the shed were built on those ancient lines whose proportions have been ousted by modern patterns, their shapes bulging and curving at the base and ends like Trafalgar line-of-battle ships, with which venerable hulks, indeed, these vehicles evidenced a constructed spirit curiously in harmony. One was laden with sheep-cribs, another with hurdles, another with ash poles, and the fourth, at the foot of which she had placed her thatching-spars was half full of similar bundles.

She was pausing a moment with that easeful sense of accomplishment which follows work done that has been a hard struggle in the doing, when she heard a woman's voice on the other side of the hedge say, anxiously, "George!" In a moment the name was repeated, with "Do come indoors! What are you doing there?"

The cart-house adjoined the garden, and before Marty had moved she saw enter the latter from the timber-merchant's back door an elderly woman sheltering a candle with her hand, the light from which cast a moving thorn-pattern of shade on Marty's face. Its rays soon fell upon a man whose clothes were roughly thrown on, standing in advance of the speaker. He was a thin, slightly stooping figure, with a small nervous mouth and a face cleanly shaven; and he walked along the path with his eyes bent on the ground. In the pair Marty South recognized her employer Melbury and his wife. She was the second Mrs. Melbury, the first having died shortly after the birth of the timber-merchant's only child.

"'Tis no use to stay in bed," he said, as soon as she came up to where he was pacing restlessly about. "I can't sleep—I keep thinking of things, and worrying about the girl, till I'm quite in a fever of anxiety." He went on to say that he could

not think why "she (Marty knew he was speaking of his daughter) did not answer his letter. She must be ill—she must, certainly," he said.

"No, no. 'Tis all right, George," said his wife; and she assured him that such things always did appear so gloomy in the night-time, if people allowed their minds to run on them; that when morning came it was seen that such fears were nothing but shadows. "Grace is as well as you or I," she declared.

But he persisted that she did not see all—that she did not see as much as he. His daughter's not writing was only one part of his worry. On account of her he was anxious concerning money affairs, which he would never alarm his mind about otherwise. The reason he gave was that, as she had nobody to depend upon for a provision but himself, he wished her, when he was gone, to be securely out of risk of poverty.

To this Mrs. Melbury replied that Grace would be sure to marry well, and that hence a hundred pounds more or less from him would not make much difference.

Her husband said that that was what she, Mrs. Melbury, naturally thought; but there she was wrong, and in that lay the source of his trouble. "I have a plan in my head about her," he said; "and according to my plan she won't marry a rich man."

"A plan for her not to marry well?" said his wife, surprised.

"Well, in one sense it is that," replied Melbury. "It is a plan for her to marry a particular person, and as he has not so much money as she might expect, it might be called as you call it. I may not be able to carry it out; and even if I do, it

may not be a good thing for her. I want her to marry Giles Winterborne."

His companion repeated the name. "Well, it is all right," she said, presently. "He adores the very ground she walks on; only he's close, and won't show it much."

Marty South appeared startled, and could not tear herself away.

Yes, the timber-merchant asserted, he knew that well enough. Winterborne had been interested in his daughter for years; that was what had led him into the notion of their union. And he knew that she used to have no objection to him. But it was not any difficulty about that which embarrassed him. It was that, since he had educated her so well, and so long, and so far above the level of daughters thereabout, it was "wasting her" to give her to a man of no higher standing than the young man in question.

"That's what I have been thinking," said Mrs. Melbury.

"Well, then, Lucy, now you've hit it," answered the timber-merchant, with feeling. "There lies my trouble. I vowed to let her marry him, and to make her as valuable as I could to him by schooling her as many years and as thoroughly as possible. I mean to keep my vow. I made it because I did his father a terrible wrong; and it was a weight on my conscience ever since that time till this scheme of making amends occurred to me through seeing that Giles liked her."

"Wronged his father?" asked Mrs. Melbury.

"Yes, grievously wronged him," said her husband.

"Well, don't think of it to-night," she urged. "Come indoors."

"No, no, the air cools my head. I shall not stay long." He was silent a while; then he told her, as nearly as Marty could gather, that his first wife, his daughter Grace's mother, was first the sweetheart of Winterborne's father, who loved her tenderly, till he, the speaker, won her away from him by a trick, because he wanted to marry her himself. He sadly went on to say that the other man's happiness was ruined by it; that though he married Winterborne's mother, it was but a half-hearted business with him. Melbury added that he was afterwards very miserable at what he had done; but that as time went on, and the children grew up, and seemed to be attached to each other, he determined to do all he could to right the wrong by letting his daughter marry the lad; not only that, but to give her the best education he could afford, so as to make the gift as valuable a one as it lay in his power to bestow. "I still mean to do it," said Melbury.

"Then do," said she.

"But all these things trouble me," said he; "for I feel I am sacrificing her for my own sin; and I think of her, and often come down here and look at this."

"Look at what?" asked his wife.

He took the candle from her hand, held it to the ground, and removed a tile which lay in the garden-path. "'Tis the track of her shoe that she made when she ran down here the day before she went away all those months ago. I covered it up when she was gone; and when I come here and look at it, I ask myself again, why should she be sacrificed to a poor man?"

"It is not altogether a sacrifice," said the woman. "He is in love with her, and he's honest and upright. If she encourages him, what can you wish for more?"

"I wish for nothing definite. But there's a lot of things possible for her. Why, Mrs. Charmond is wanting some refined young lady, I hear, to go abroad with her—as companion or something of the kind. She'd jump at Grace."

"That's all uncertain. Better stick to what's sure."

"True, true," said Melbury; "and I hope it will be for the best. Yes, let me get 'em married up as soon as I can, so as to have it over and done with." He continued looking at the imprint, while he added, "Suppose she should be dying, and never make a track on this path any more?"

"She'll write soon, depend upon't. Come, 'tis wrong to stay here and brood so."

He admitted it, but said he could not help it. "Whether she write or no, I shall fetch her in a few days." And thus speaking, he covered the track, and preceded his wife indoors.

Melbury, perhaps, was an unlucky man in having within him the sentiment which could indulge in this foolish fondness about the imprint of a daughter's footstep. Nature does not carry on her government with a view to such feelings, and when advancing years render the open hearts of those who possess them less dexterous than formerly in shutting against the blast, they must suffer "buffeting at will by rain and storm" no less than Little Celandines.

But her own existence, and not Mr. Melbury's, was the centre of Marty's consciousness, and it was in relation to

this that the matter struck her as she slowly withdrew.

"That, then, is the secret of it all," she said. "And Giles Winterborne is not for me, and the less I think of him the better."

She returned to her cottage. The sovereigns were staring at her from the looking-glass as she had left them. With a preoccupied countenance, and with tears in her eyes, she got a pair of scissors, and began mercilessly cutting off the long locks of her hair, arranging and tying them with their points all one way, as the barber had directed. Upon the pale scrubbed deal of the coffin-stool table they stretched like waving and ropy weeds over the washed gravel-bed of a clear stream.

She would not turn again to the little looking-glass, out of humanity to herself, knowing what a deflowered visage would look back at her, and almost break her heart; she dreaded it as much as did her own ancestral goddess Sif the reflection in the pool after the rape of her locks by Loke the malicious. She steadily stuck to business, wrapped the hair in a parcel, and sealed it up, after which she raked out the fire and went to bed, having first set up an alarum made of a candle and piece of thread, with a stone attached.

But such a reminder was unnecessary to-night. Having tossed till about five o'clock, Marty heard the sparrows walking down their long holes in the thatch above her sloping ceiling to their orifice at the eaves; whereupon she also arose, and descended to the ground-floor again.

It was still dark, but she began moving about the house in those automatic initiatory acts and touches which represent among housewives the installation of another

day. While thus engaged she heard the rumbling of Mr. Melbury's wagons, and knew that there, too, the day's toil had begun.

An armful of gads thrown on the still hot embers caused them to blaze up cheerfully and bring her diminished head-gear into sudden prominence as a shadow. At this a step approached the door.

"Are folk astir here yet?" inquired a voice she knew well.

"Yes, Mr. Winterborne," said Marty, throwing on a tilt bonnet, which completely hid the recent ravages of the scissors. "Come in!"

The door was flung back, and there stepped in upon the mat a man not particularly young for a lover, nor particularly mature for a person of affairs. There was reserve in his glance, and restraint upon his mouth. He carried a horn lantern which hung upon a swivel, and wheeling as it dangled marked grotesque shapes upon the shadier part of the walls.

He said that he had looked in on his way down, to tell her that they did not expect her father to make up his contract if he was not well. Mr. Melbury would give him another week, and they would go their journey with a short load that day.

"They are done," said Marty, "and lying in the cart-house."

"Done!" he repeated. "Your father has not been too ill to work after all, then?"

She made some evasive reply. "I'll show you where they be, if you are going down," she added.