

TESS OF THE *D'URBERVILLES* SUMMARY

is a novel about a poor young woman named Tess Durbeyfield whose father sends her to work for the rich Stoke-d'Urberville family, to whom he mistakenly believes they are related.

- Alec Stoke-d'Urberville rapes Tess. She returns home, where she gives birth to a child who soon dies.
- Tess becomes a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy, where she falls in love with Angel Clare, a young intellectual she met years before. On their wedding night, Angel learns about Tess's past and abandons her.
- Angel leaves for Brazil, then returns to find that Tess has killed Alec. Tess is arrested and hanged.

Summary

Summary of the Novel

After John Durbeyfield, a country peasant, learns he is descended from a noble family, he gets tipsy at a local alehouse. Early the next morning, Tess, his dutiful daughter, sets out to market, but she falls asleep and the family's horse dies in an accident. Tess is sent to seek work from Mrs. D'Urberville, a rich lady whom the Durbeyfields believe to be of a junior branch of the ancient family from whom they are descended. The Durbeyfields do not know that the D'Urberville name has been adopted for status purposes by a newly rich family, originally the Stokes, from the north of England. Tess's looks impress Alec Stoke-D'Urberville, who offers her a job. For several months, Alec romantically pursues Tess, finally taking her against her will in a darkened forest. She stays with him a few weeks before returning home.

Tess gives birth, but the infant soon dies, and Tess is forced to bury it herself. After a year at home, Tess becomes a milkmaid at the hospitable Talbothays Dairy, where she meets a young man who had briefly impressed her in her youth. This cultured and intellectual young man, Angel Clare, studying to be a farmer, falls in love with Tess because of her beauty and purity. Tess is reluctant, but eventually accepts the marriage and tries unsuccessfully to reveal her past before the ceremony.

The night after their wedding, Angel confesses to Tess a past liaison. Tess forgives him, but when Tess details her past, Angel is too shocked to forgive. He deserts Tess, but allows her to appeal to his parents if she has any financial troubles.

Angel sets off for Brazil to buy a farm. Tess must accept a winter job at a farm where she and her co-workers are treated brutally. Tess decides to visit Angel's parents. Before seeing them, she overhears Angel's brothers scorning his unwise marriage. On her way back, Tess hears an itinerant preacher who turns out to be Alec D'Urberville.

When he sees Tess, Alec's lust is reawakened and his religious conversion is undone. Alec again pursues Tess, offering her and her family much-needed financial help and reminding her that her husband is not acting as her protector. After her father dies and her family is rendered homeless, Tess succumbs to Alec.

Angel has been recovering from fever in Brazil, and he decides to return to England to reclaim his bride. However, when he meets her at Sandbourne, it is obvious Tess has bartered herself to D'Urberville and that Angel has arrived too late. Angel walks the streets in despair, at the same time Tess's landlord notices an ominous bloodstain, revealing that Tess has murdered Alec. Within moments the word is out and Tess is being pursued again, this time by the law. Tess and Angel spend an idyllic few days in an abandoned mansion. Trying to evade capture, they stop for the night at Stonehenge, but in the morning police surround the ancient monument and take Tess away. Her execution is witnessed only by Angel and Tess's younger sister.

Character List

- **Tess Durbeyfield**

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The novel's protagonist. Tess is a beautiful, loyal young woman living with her impoverished family in the village of Marlott. Tess has a keen sense of responsibility and is committed to doing the best she can for her family, although her inexperience and lack of wise parenting leave her extremely vulnerable. Her life is complicated when her father discovers a link to the noble line of the d'Urbervilles, and, as a result, Tess is sent to work at the d'Urberville mansion. Unfortunately, her ideals cannot prevent her from sliding further and further into misfortune after she becomes pregnant by Alec d'Urberville. The terrible irony is that Tess and her family are not really related to this branch of the d'Urbervilles at all: Alec's father, a merchant named Simon Stokes, simply assumed the name after he retired.

- **Angel Clare**

An intelligent young man who has decided to become a farmer to preserve his intellectual freedom from the pressures of city life. Angel's father and his two brothers are respected clergymen, but Angel's religious doubts have kept him from joining the ministry. He meets Tess when she is a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy and quickly falls in love with her.

- **Alec d'Urberville**

The handsome, amoral son of a wealthy merchant named Simon Stokes. Alec is not really a d'Urberville—his father simply took on the name of the ancient noble family after he built his mansion and retired. Alec is a manipulative, sinister young man who does everything he can to seduce the inexperienced Tess when she comes to work for his family. When he finally has his way with her, out in the woods, he subsequently tries to help her but is unable to make her love him.

- **Mr. John Durbeyfield**

Tess's father, a lazy peddler in Marlott. John is naturally quick, but he hates work. When he learns that he descends from the noble line of the d'Urbervilles, he is quick to make an attempt to profit from the connection.

- **Mrs. Joan Durbeyfield**

Tess's mother. Joan has a strong sense of propriety and very particular hopes for Tess's life. She is continually disappointed and hurt by the way in which her daughter's life actually proceeds. But she is also somewhat simpleminded and

naturally forgiving, and she is unable to remain angry with Tess—particularly once Tess becomes her primary means of support.

- **Mrs. d'Urberville**

Alec's mother, and the widow of Simon Stokes. Mrs. d'Urberville is blind and often ill. She cares deeply for her animals, but not for her maid Elizabeth, her son Alec, nor Tess when she comes to work for her. In fact, she never sees Tess as anything more than an impoverished girl.

- **Marian, Izz Huett, and Retty Priddle**

Milkmaids whom Tess befriends at the Talbothays Dairy. Marian, Izz, and Retty remain close to Tess throughout the rest of her life. They are all in love with Angel and are devastated when he chooses Tess over them: Marian turns to drink, Retty attempts suicide, and Izz nearly runs off to Brazil with Angel when he leaves Tess. Nevertheless, they remain helpful to Tess. Marian helps her find a job at a farm called Flintcomb-Ash, and Marian and Izz write Angel a plaintive letter encouraging him to give Tess another chance.

- **Reverend Clare**

Angel's father, a somewhat intractable but principled clergyman in the town of Emminster. Mr. Clare considers it his duty to convert the populace. One of his most difficult cases proves to be none other than Alec d'Urberville.

- **Mrs. Clare**

Angel's mother, a loving but snobbish woman who places great stock in social class. Mrs. Clare wants Angel to marry a suitable woman, meaning a woman with the proper social, financial, and religious background. Mrs. Clare initially looks down on Tess as a "simple" and impoverished girl, but later grows to appreciate her.

- **Reverend Felix Clare**

Angel's brother, a village curate.

- **Reverend Cuthbert**

Clare Angel's brother, a classical scholar and dean at Cambridge. Cuthbert, who can concentrate only on university matters, marries Mercy Chant.

- **Eliza Louisa Durbeyfield**

Tess's younger sister. Tess believes Liza-Lu has all of Tess's own good qualities and none of her bad ones, and she encourages Angel to look after and even marry Liza-Lu after Tess dies.

- **Sorrow**

Tess's son with Alec d'Urberville. Sorrow dies in his early infancy, after Tess christens him herself. She later buries him herself as well, and decorates his grave

MaryChant

The daughter of a friend of the Reverend Clare. Mr. Clare hopes Angel will marry Mercy, but after Angel marries Tess, Mercy becomes engaged to his brother Cuthbert instead.

Objective type questions

1. Which of these reasons is *not* one of Mr. Tulliver's reasons for sending Tom on for more education?

- So that Tom can teach Maggie
- So that Tom can learn to write well
- So that Tom will have something else to do besides take over the mill from Mr. Tulliver
- So that Tom can help Mr. Tulliver with law documents and arbitrations

2. What does Mr. Tulliver seek Mr. Riley's advice about?

- Maggie's uncanny intelligence
- Tulliver's dispute with Mr. Pivart over the Floss water
- Tom's education
- Tulliver's disputes with his wife's family, the Dodsons

3. What book does Maggie show Mr. Riley that she is reading?

- *Aesop's Fables*
- *The Christian Year*
- *Pilgrim's Progress*
- *The History of the Devil*

4. Why does Tom first get angry at Maggie when he comes home from school in Book First?

- Because she won't curl her hair
- Because she doesn't play fair at Heads or Tails
- Because she has forgotten to feed his rabbits and they've died
- Because she speaks badly of Lucy

5. Why does Tom break off his friendship with Bob Jakin?

- Because Bob is better at trapping rabbits than Tom
- Because Bob is not intelligent
- Because Bob does not play fairly
- Because Bob has stolen Tom's pocketknife

6. What impulsive action does Maggie take during the visit of her aunts and uncles in Book First?

- She falls in the mud
- She eats Tom's dessert
- She steps on a cake
- She cuts her own hair

7. What do Mrs. Glegg and Mr. Tulliver have a disagreement over?

- Table linens
- Tom's education
- The 500 pounds Mrs. Glegg has lent Mr. Tulliver
- Maggie's behavior

8. Why does Mr. Tulliver ultimately decide not to press his sister for the money she owes him?

- Because he thinks of Maggie dependent upon Tom after his own death
- Because he sees her eight children
- Because Mr. Moss convinces him to lay off
- Because another investment of his makes good

9. What are Maggie's intentions towards the gypsies?

- To use them to make her family pity her
- To learn their language
- To teach them and be their queen
- To teach them how to cook

10. What was St. Ogg's profession?

- A farmer

- A miller
- A priest
- A ferryman

11. Who insists upon the repayment of the 500 pounds between Mr. Tulliver and Mrs. Glegg?

- Mrs. Glegg
- Mr. Tulliver
- Mrs. Tulliver
- Mr. Glegg

12. Who is Tom's only playmate during his first term with Mr. Stelling?

- Poulter
- Bob Jakin
- Laura Stelling
- Yap

13. Why is Christmas dreary after Tom's first term with Mr. Stelling?

- Because Maggie has become religiously ascetic
- Because Tom hates school
- Because the Dodsons refuse to visit
- Because Mr. Tulliver is preoccupied with litigation over the river water

14. How does Philip Wakem first win Tom's respect?

- His singing
- His drawing skills
- His intelligence
- His self-assured demeanor

15. What feature of Maggie's draws Philip to her?

- Her eyes
- Her hair
- Her linguistic prowess

- Her impetuosity

16. What is Philip's first thought when Tom drops a sword on his own foot?

- That Tom deserved it
- That Tom might fear he will be lame for life
- That Tom is headstrong and stupid
- That warfare is wrong

17. With whom does Maggie go to boarding school?

- Her mother
- Miss Guest
- Tom
- Lucy Deane

18. What is Mr. Tulliver reading when he has a stroke?

- A decision against him in the court case over the water power
- A notice from his lawyer, Mr. Gore, that he is bankrupted
- A letter stating that the mortgage of the mill has been transferred to Wakem
- A letter from Maggie saying she will be home soon

19. Why does Maggie become angry at her aunts and uncles during her father's illness?

- Because they are insulting Tom about the benefits of his education
- Because they will not offer to buy any of the family's furniture
- Because they are insulting to Mrs. Moss
- Because they have befriended Lawyer Wakem

20. What causes Lawyer Wakem to buy the mill?

- The transference of Tulliver's mortgage to him
- Mrs. Tulliver's visit to him
- Mr. Riley's recommendation
- Tom's proud behavior

21. What does Mr. Tulliver make Tom write in the family Bible?

- A notice that Maggie will never marry
- A notice that Wakem is not forgiven
- The occasion of Tom's repayment of the family debts
- The formal transference of power from Tulliver to Tom

22. How does Tom manage to pay off the family debt?

- By saving his wages at Guest & Co.
- Through an entrepreneurial scheme with Bob Jakin
- By appealing to Mr. Glegg for money
- By selling his own goods

23. What is Stephen Guest's relationship to Lucy Deane?

- They are engaged
- They are married
- They are courting
- They are friends

24. What is the significance of Maggie's sewing?

- It shows that she is accomplished in female arts
- It shows her love of handicraft
- It signifies nothing
- It shows that she has been in financial difficulty

25. Why does Maggie become angry when Stephen kisses her arm at the dance?

- Because Lucy might have seen
- Because Maggie is engaged to Philip
- Because he is drunk
- Because it shows that Stephen thinks lightly of her

26. Which of the following is *not* a reason that Maggie decides to leave Stephen in Mudport and return to St. Ogg's?

- Because she feels her life with Stephen wouldn't be noble

- Because she feels the pull of the past on her
- Because she knows that St. Ogg's will never accept her as Stephen's wife
- Because she sympathizes with Lucy's and Philip's positions

-----All the Best -----
