

Chapter 2 1/2

Henchard made his way into the town of Casterbridge, penniless, depressed, and entirely ignorant of what he might do to sustain himself. He didn't much care for himself now, knowing the deed he had done. It was out of season for hay-trussing, and he had not been able to find work at that task even when it was at the height of its demand. He was faced with finding another occupation.

But what can a man who has no skills other than hay trussing do? He walked down the main street of the town, stopping at every shop and inn to offer his services. As each establishment turned him away, quoting no need for general labor, especially from a migrant like him, something altogether strange happened in Henchard. Rather than becoming more depressed, he became more determined. He resolved that he would find work in this town, simply to spite the people who had turned him away. He also felt he owed it to himself to try and pick up the pieces of his shattered life in case Susan should ever find him again, despite the slim chance of that ever happening. Though he had his faults, Henchard was strong-minded when he decided to be.

At the next several doors, Henchard was very stubborn. When he would at first be refused, he would insist upon a chance to prove his worthiness by performing some task for the shopkeeper. Most simply refused, but at some places it got him in the door to speak as best he could on his own behalf. It was near the end of the street that one shopkeeper agreed to take on Henchard's services, but only after he had insisted on delivering a package for the man to a customer across town. When he returned, the shopkeeper offered to pay him for his general labor, but at a rate that was far below anything necessary to subsist upon. Henchard, though disappointed, argued the value of his ability to work with a determination he had never known before. He argued long and hard, with smart and clever thought and speech, managing to gain many concessions from the man. He failed, however, to gain much overall in the way of salary from the shopkeeper in this negotiation, for the man simply had nothing more to give. He managed to negotiate a salary that would allow him to survive, but barely. It was as Henchard moved to shake on the deal when a patron of the shop spoke up.

"Wait," he said, "I can see you are worth much more than that to me. I am in need of one who can act as a salesman, and you have just proven your ability to sell yourself. Come to work for me." The man was a businessman of the highest repute in Casterbridge, and had no son to succeed him in his business. As he grew old, he had begun to look for one whom he could take under his wing, and Henchard's determination and negotiating skill that had caught his eye.

So Henchard agreed, and the man taught him the ways of business, sending Henchard on the road to success.

