



The Best Bit

David R., Bristol, age 37, on Tess of the d'Urbervilles

ALL SHE WANTS is to go to a place where no ghost of the past can reach her. She says that, you know – or words to that effect. That's all Tess wants. I think it's moving to hear a sentiment like that, don't you? I mean, I moved to Oldham once because I wanted to get away from Bristol, but it wasn't the same. I was mostly just sick of the pubs. Tess has got more of a reason to want to forget the past. For me, this bit of the book comes down to a simple lesson: you know at heart you're a good person, yeah? You know things have happened in your past. They shouldn't matter. You

know they shouldn't. But they do matter, at least to some. You're not proud of them. It's just, you know ... they're there. I'm glad he was able to write it like that. I like when Hardy does that sort of thing. He can really kick you in the goolies sometimes, that guy. Emotionally, I mean.

But the bit that gets me is when Tess writes her letter. She just spills out the truth about herself and the next day, after this horrible night, she's trying to figure out if Angel Clare has read the thing and if he'll still marry her. It's excruciating. But there he is in the morning, you

know? Standing right there, isn't he? He loves her just as much as he did the day before and she's thinking: yeah, this could be all right after all. I got away with this one. I just told the truth.

But then – and this just broke my bloody heart – Tess finds her letter. Angel Clare's not read it after all. She finds it tucked under the carpet – that bloody carpet, know what I mean? I literally looked at carpet differently after that. You know, you don't get carpet playing the role of a villain in a lot of books. And now it's too late for Tess, isn't it? She can't tell the truth. I swear, when I read that it was like my heart was put in the shredder, one of those massive paper shredders. You don't come away from that bit lightly. To this day I tell my friends, 'Check the carpet after your mail gets delivered. Every time.'