

# The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in a small hamlet in Dorset, England. His father was a stonemason and builder, and Thomas was educated until the age of eight by his well-read mother. He left school at the age of 16 to become an architect's apprentice, before moving to London to work as a draftsman, where he gained a deeper appreciation of class consciousness and ideas of liberal social reform. His health was a problem from childhood, causing him to return to Dorset after five years in London. Upon his return, he began to devote his attention to writing. Primarily a poet at first, Hardy turned to prose when none of his verse found immediate publication. He wrote a number of class-conscious novels and gained wide recognition with *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874. The same year, Hardy married Emma Gifford against the wishes of both their families. Over the course of his first marriage, he published a prolific number of works, including the two novels widely considered to be his finest, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, with the encouragement and help of his wife—though their relationship was forced and distant for its final 20 years. Much of Hardy's writing was set in southwestern England, a place he referred to in both his fiction and his poetry (which he always valued more highly) as "Wessex." Two years after the death of his first wife, Emma, Hardy married Florence Emily Dugdale. He died at the age of 87, having been appointed a Member of the Order of Merit. His cremated remains were interred in Westminster Abbey, though his heart was separated and buried in the churchyard of his home parish.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The source story for "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" came to Hardy through a few different sources, including the local newspaper's account of the soldiers' execution and the records of their burial at Bincombe parish. These soldiers belonged to a legion of German soldiers who were posted to Dorset by King George III in the early 1800s, a period during the Napoleonic Wars when England feared (needlessly, as it turned out) a coastal invasion by Napoleon, Emperor of France.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" was written over the course of a few prolific years for Thomas Hardy. A few months before drafting "The Melancholy Hussar," Hardy wrote and published *Wessex Tales*, a collection of short stories that focus on ideas of social class and rank, unwanted and unhappy

marriages, and the status of women. Themes in "The Melancholy Hussar" can also be found in many of Hardy's novels, particularly in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), whose protagonist, similar to Phyllis Grove, represents the victimhood of women, and *The Trumpet-Major* (1880), which is set in the same Napoleonic time period. One of Hardy's most notable contemporaries was Charles Dickens, whose works such as *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Great Expectations* (1861) magnify, like "The Melancholy Hussar" does, the societal pressures and problems of the first half of the 19th century. Hardy's work can be categorized alongside other contemporary writers as Victorian realism, a literary period defined by its attention to the everyday details of life and the rejection of the supernatural or melodramatic. This literary period is shared by George Eliot, whose epic novel *Middlemarch* (1872) is set, like "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion," in the English countryside and deals similarly with the issues of selfishness, provincialism, and the status of women.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion
- **When Written:** 1888–1889
- **Where Written:** Dorset, England
- **When Published:** 1890
- **Literary Period:** Victorian, Naturalism, Realism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** A small village in rural Dorset, southwest England
- **Climax:** Phyllis decides to remain loyal to her betrothed instead of escaping with her lover.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Final Novel.** When Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* was published in 1895, it was treated as offensive and immoral by some reviewers—one even nicknaming it "Jude the Obscene"—because of its representations of sexuality, and its critiques of the conventions of marriage and the class system. Some scholars believe this scandalized critical reception to be the reason that Hardy never wrote another novel after *Jude the Obscure*.

**The Hardy Tree.** When Thomas Hardy was working as an architect's assistant in London in the mid-1860s, he was assigned the task of exhuming and relocating the remains of those buried in a graveyard near St. Pancras Station in order to make way for a new rail line. Hundreds of headstones remained

after Hardy had completed the task of reburial, so he decided to place them in concentric circles around a nearby tree. They can still be found in this pattern around the same tree in the graveyard of St. Pancras Old Church.



## PLOT SUMMARY

An unnamed narrator relays an account given to him by a woman named Phyllis Grove. When Phyllis told him the story, he was a teenager and she an old woman. Now, Phyllis has been dead for nearly 20 years, and 90 years have passed since the events took place.

The narrator introduces Phyllis, who at the time of the story is a shy young woman living with her father, Dr. Grove, in the English countryside. Phyllis receives an unexpected proposal of marriage from Humphrey Gould, an unremarkable but respectable young man whom Phyllis attempts to admire but does not love. Humphrey soon leaves for Bath and does not return for a full year. During this time, a legion of German soldiers arrives to camp near Phyllis's village. She forms a connection with one of the soldiers, Matthäus Tina, after meeting him when he walks past the **wall** in her garden. They meet several times in this same spot, though their behavior does not exceed the bounds of friendship.

Hearing rumors that Humphrey, who is still in Bath, may be neglecting his engagement with her, Phyllis decides—against the forceful instructions of her father—to become closer to Matthäus Tina. Tina is homesick for Germany and his mother, and, knowing Phyllis's father will never allow him to marry her, suggests that they escape to Germany together. Phyllis is overwhelmed by the danger and uncertainty of Tina's plan. Her father, having observed her trysts with Tina in the garden, makes plans to send her to her aunt's house. Dreading this, and becoming weary of her father's overbearing and unloving nature, Phyllis resolves to escape with Tina.

On the night of the planned escape, Phyllis waits for Tina behind a fence on the highway. While she's waiting, a coach pulls up and lets two passengers out. One of the passengers is Humphrey, the other his friend. Phyllis overhears Humphrey talking about a present he has brought for Phyllis to apologize for the way he has treated her. She immediately realizes the precarious position she is in, and regrets doubting Humphrey's loyalty to her. When Tina arrives, Phyllis explains that she can't escape with him. Tina leaves anyway, unable to abandon his friend, Christoph, who is waiting at the harbor with the boat for their escape.

Phyllis returns home. The next morning, Humphrey arrives with a gift: an ornate mirror. Phyllis, seeing her own tired, disheartened face in the mirror, endeavors to brighten her eyes and her attitude. She and Humphrey go for a walk, during which Humphrey reveals to her that he has secretly married another

woman.

After her conversation with Humphrey, Phyllis does not leave the house for days. When she does, it is to walk to the garden wall where she used to talk with Matthäus Tina. Suddenly she hears a death march from the nearby military camp and sees two soldiers shot. It transpires that they are Matthäus Tina and Christoph, who mistakenly rowed to the British island of Jersey instead of the French coast and were captured as deserters.

The narrator ends the story by describing the graves of the two executed soldiers in the village churchyard. When Phyllis was alive, she tended to the graves. Now, Phyllis herself is buried near them.



## CHARACTERS

**Phyllis Grove** – Phyllis Grove is the story's protagonist, and the character who relays the story to the narrator many years later. She is a young woman who lives with her father in the countryside in Dorset, southwest England. Phyllis is so shy that she blushes when she sees other people, and when she becomes engaged to Humphrey Gould, a dull bachelor of slightly higher social standing, those around her see it as a miracle. Phyllis doesn't feel any great affection for Humphrey, who soon leaves the village for the unusually long period of a year, and she's very quick to believe rumors that he has neglected the engagement. This allows her to justify and demonstrate her affection to Matthäus Tina, a German soldier posted nearby who walks past her **garden wall** in the evenings. Phyllis continues these trysts against her unaffectionate father's wishes, and when Tina invites her to escape to Germany with him where they will marry, it's her father's overbearing nature that pushes her to overcome her fear and agree. But Phyllis finds herself drawn back into a life of constraint when she learns that Humphrey has returned to bring her a gift and apologize for his absence. She immediately regrets her disloyalty to him, and her fears of social instability and scandal cement her decision to stay in England without Matthäus Tina. She has a brief moment of potential courage when she watches Tina walking away from her and longs to run after him—but her caution leads her to return home. She soon learns that Humphrey has brought her the gift, an ornate mirror, not to prove his loyalty to her, but to appease her before he shares that he has secretly married another woman. Phyllis is relieved to learn this, valuing an unmarried life more than an unhappy marriage. When she later sees Matthäus Tina and Christoph shot in the military camp, however, her feelings betray her: she faints, remaining unconscious for days and delirious for weeks. For the rest of her life, she tends the graves of the two soldiers, and when she dies, she is buried nearby.

**Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier** – Matthäus Tina is a soldier in the German Legion who forms a connection—first

friendly, then romantic—with Phyllis when the Legion is posted nearby. He is deeply homesick for the part of Germany he is from, a town called Saarbrück, where his mother still lives. Tina meets Phyllis when he walks past her **garden wall**, dressed in the stiff, ornate military garb that distinguishes him as a foreign soldier and seeming melancholy and withdrawn. When he sees Phyllis sitting on the wall in a low-cut dress, he blushes and walks on silently, demonstrating the same shyness that Phyllis shares. Over the following days, however, Tina walks the same way, having gradually longer conversations with Phyllis and sharing with her his homesickness and his resentment at being posted to England. Eventually, he tells her his plan to escape to Germany and asks her to join him. Tina knows the dangers of the plan—if he's caught, he'll be punished as a deserter—but he's so desperate to return to his home and his mother, he's willing to accept those risks. Once he has made his plans to escape—along with Phyllis and his friend, Christoph—he becomes more reckless. At one point, he stays to talk to Phyllis even after the military camp closes, at risk of demotion, because he prioritizes his loyalty and love for Phyllis over his military status. On the night of the escape, when Phyllis explains to him her decision to stay in England, Tina does not attempt to persuade her otherwise. His respect for her decision leads him to put aside his own desires, and his loyalty to Christoph, who is waiting at the harbor with the escape boat, means he must continue his plan without her. Ultimately, that loyalty leads to his death, after he and Christoph, along with two other soldiers who also decided to escape, are caught in Jersey and punished for desertion. Tina and Christoph take the blame for the escape, saving the other two soldiers and guaranteeing themselves capital punishment. Matthäus Tina dies in England, the place he was so desperate to escape, and is buried in the churchyard in an unmarked grave, next to Christoph's grave, and eventually Phyllis's, too.

**Humphrey Gould** – Humphrey Gould is a bachelor from a local family, unremarkable in both appearance and personality, who becomes engaged to Phyllis Grove. He is considered an unusually good match for her due to his slightly higher social status, though in reality he is no better off financially than Phyllis and her father. Shortly after proposing to Phyllis, Humphrey leaves for Bath, and though he promises to return to her, he stays away for a whole year. He sends letters to Phyllis, but they contain no more than formalities. He doesn't display any great affection towards her, and his absence and lack of obvious emotional attachment strengthen the rumor that he no longer considers their engagement to be a sure thing. Humphrey returns to see Phyllis, bringing a gift—an ornate mirror—but instead of restating his intention to marry her, he reveals that he has secretly married another woman. He needs Phyllis to explain to his father, who would otherwise oppose this secret marriage, that she could never have married Humphrey. Humphrey seems to have his selfishness rewarded, receiving what he desires before vanishing from the story.

**Dr. Grove/Phyllis's Father** – Phyllis's father, Dr. Grove, was once a professional, but his habits of solitary philosophical meditation reduced his income so greatly that he and Phyllis were forced to move to the countryside, no longer able to afford to live in a larger town. In the country, Dr. Grove has become more and more irritable and withdrawn, and he is unkind and oppressive to Phyllis. When rumors circulate that Humphrey may not plan on honoring his engagement to Phyllis, Dr. Grove refuses to believe them, instructing Phyllis to remain patient and loyal to the man who has shown her so little regard. He soon learns of Phyllis's frequent conversations with a German soldier, and tells her she cannot go further than the **garden wall** without his permission. Dr. Grove, desiring even more control over his daughter, eventually decides Phyllis must leave the village to stay with her aunt until the soldiers have moved on from their camp, and his control over her extends to his directions on what to pack for her stay. He is "triumphant" when Humphrey returns, pleased by his (incorrect) assumption that his daughter will finally have a respectable marriage.

**Narrator** – The unnamed narrator is a man from the part of the English countryside in which the story takes place. He was told the story by Phyllis many years ago, when he was a teenager and she was 75. The narrator plays no part in the events of the story, but mentions that he has visited the churchyard where the two soldiers and Phyllis are buried. He is the first to share the tale widely, having waited many years to do so out of respect for Phyllis's wishes that it be kept secret until she had been dead a long time.

**Christoph** – Christoph is Matthäus Tina's friend in the German Legion and his collaborator in the escape to Germany. He plays a vital part in the plan, collecting a boat from the harbor in which the two hope to row to the French coast. Due to a navigational error, however, Tina and Christoph find themselves in Jersey (a British island) instead of France, and are captured for desertion and sentenced to death. Christoph demonstrates the same loyalty and self-sacrifice as Tina when the two of them claim full responsibility for the escape, allowing the other accompanying soldiers to avoid capital punishment. Christoph is buried alongside Matthäus Tina in the village churchyard in Dorset.

**Humphrey's Father** – Humphrey's father is an elderly man who has become too feeble to attend to his own affairs. Humphrey claims that his father's weakness is the reason he needs to stay away from Phyllis for so long. Readers learn that Humphrey's father is, like Dr. Grove, intent on Humphrey's successful engagement to Phyllis, and will not approve of Humphrey's secret, less respectable marriage.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-

coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### CAPTIVITY, RESTRICTION, AND ESCAPE

Phyllis, a solitary young woman who lives in the English countryside, and Matthäus Tina, a German Hussar camped near Phyllis's home, both find themselves in situations of captivity that cause them to resent and resist their circumstances, to unhappy or even disastrous ends. Phyllis lives in the countryside with her father, Dr. Grove, as his tendency towards solitary meditation has reduced their financial means, and living in a town is no longer within their budget. Her life with her father, particularly after she meets Matthäus Tina, has become "irksome and painful in the extreme" and she receives very little affection from him. Phyllis's reluctant engagement to a young man named Humphrey becomes another restriction, compounded by her father's insistence that the engagement remain intact, and his efforts to keep her from seeing Matthäus Tina, whom she meets and befriends while Humphrey is away. To separate the lovers, Phyllis's father plans to send her to stay at her aunt's home, a place Phyllis feels is "a prison." Meanwhile, Matthäus Tina, bound by his military status, longs to be back in his homeland and near his mother in the German town of Saarbrück. He hates England, yet leaving without permission would mean becoming a deserter.

Neither character is able to make a decision that results in their freedom. Matthäus Tina attempts to escape England, which ends in execution for himself and his fellow soldier; Phyllis, bound by the restrictions of her father and the expectations of society, decides to honor her engagement to Humphrey—an engagement, it turns out, he has secretly disregarded in order to marry another, exerting the freedom granted by his gender and slightly higher social status. Both Phyllis and Matthäus Tina, forced to remain in situations that cause them great sadness, are eventually buried near each other in the part of the world they have attempted to leave, suggesting that the restrictions of money, family, and wartime are inescapable, and that trying to escape them is futile.



### LOVE VS. SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS

Throughout the story, Phyllis's own feelings of attraction and desire are constantly at odds with what is expected of her by society. When she becomes engaged to Humphrey, who is from a respectable family and a higher social class, it's "as if she were going to be taken to heaven" in others' eyes—despite Humphrey's inherent, almost indescribable dullness. The lack of romance in this match is clear, and dramatically contrasts with Phyllis's feelings towards Matthäus Tina, whom she meets later on. While

Humphrey is "neither young nor old; neither good-looking nor positively plain," Tina's face is "striking" and "handsome," and Phyllis can't get it out of her mind. Though Humphrey leaves for Bath and does not return for a year, and though the letters he has sent her lack affection—and even despite the rumors Phyllis hears of Humphrey neglecting their engagement—she feels hesitant to express any affection to Matthäus Tina despite feeling that affection deeply. Hardy describes "the stone wall of necessity" standing between Phyllis and Matthäus Tina, emphasizing that their differing social statuses and Phyllis's engagement form an insurmountable barrier between the two.

Phyllis's father is the main proponent in Phyllis's life of the social pressure to marry well. He quotes the Elizabethan lyric, "Love me little, love me long," to imply that Phyllis should be satisfied with her formal and unromantic match, and that her dignity within society is more important than her happiness. Phyllis decides to honor her engagement with Humphrey not because of her own feelings of loyalty, but because she's afraid of the "vague" and "venturesome" life she would have with Matthäus Tina, and of losing the respect of others. The societal expectation that she should be happy with a respectable marriage means she forfeits a life with her lover for the "dreary prospect" of life with Humphrey—an outcome that shows the unhappiness that results from conforming to social rules instead of marrying for love.



### GENDER, RANK, AND POWER

While Phyllis has very little power over her circumstances, the story demonstrates that the men around her wield more power over theirs. On the rare occasions when Phyllis is able to make a decision about the path of her life, she is still restricted by her overbearing father, her lack of connection, her lack of money, and her status as a woman. When she hears the rumors about Humphrey's lack of loyalty to her, she makes the decision to become more affectionate with her new friend Matthäus Tina—but still does so secretly, never going further than the **garden wall**. Phyllis's father, finding out about her relationship with Tina, makes plans to send her to her aunt's home, emphasizing that Phyllis's life is not under her control but can be changed at the whim of a patriarchal figure.

Matthäus Tina, on the other hand, is restricted not by gender but by rank, kept against his will in a country he loathes. However, he is able to carry out his fatal escape plan with seemingly less concern for "esteem" than Phyllis has. Where he is thwarted by a death sentence due to his military status, Phyllis is hamstrung by the restrictions placed on her because of her gendered place in society. Ultimately, it turns out that Humphrey is the most powerful character in the story, due to both his gender and rank. He is able to make the decision Phyllis cannot: to find and marry a person he loves, despite his engagement to someone else. Phyllis is even asked for her help

in convincing Humphrey's father of his marriage, which means that Phyllis wields the only power she has—her expression of interest, or lack of interest—to serve the happiness of a man. Through these characters' decisions and outcomes, Hardy quietly critiques the hierarchy of power operating in his day, with women at the bottom and well-connected men at the top.



## SECRECY, RUMOR, AND STORYTELLING

"The Melancholy Hussar" is set 90 years earlier, and the narrator is retelling a version of it that Phyllis told him 20 years ago, when he was 15 years old. Phyllis also tells the narrator that she wishes for her story to be kept a secret until she is "dead, buried, and forgotten." Furthermore, throughout the story, secrecy and rumor affect many of the decisions Phyllis makes. It is a rumor about Humphrey that causes her to cultivate her feelings for Matthäus Tina, and it is only because she overhears fragments of conversation between Humphrey and his friend and interprets them in a certain way that she decides not to escape with the man she truly loves. The narrator suggests that the rumors shared about Phyllis during her life were fragments, too, and only the ones "most unfavorable to her character." The length of time between the events and the narrator's recounting of them, along with Phyllis's desire for discretion, implies that this story could have powerful and damaging consequences for anyone involved in it.

By suggesting that the story can only be told now that its characters have died and been mostly forgotten, Hardy emphasizes the danger and power of stories, and the effect they can have on a person's dignity and pride. Yet, because the narrator is recounting the version of the story told to him by Phyllis, and because he is attempting to fill in the parts of the story left out from the unflattering rumors, Hardy also suggests that sharing a complete story is less damaging to the reputations of those involved—after all, it allows one's decisions to be clearly understood, rather than allowing fragmentary, possibly misleading rumors to spread unchecked.



## LOYALTY

Phyllis, Humphrey, and Matthäus Tina each struggle with loyalty throughout the story, and their decisions about where they place their loyalty are ultimately what decide their fate. Phyllis is loyal to Humphrey for the first year of their engagement, but when she hears that Humphrey may not be honoring the engagement in the same way, her loyalty to him weakens, and she allows herself to think of Matthäus Tina as her lover. But when she overhears Humphrey talking with his friend about his plan to bring Phyllis a present and apologize for his behavior, her loyalty to him is immediately restored. Meanwhile, Humphrey has disregarded the engagement in order to secretly marry his love match—meaning that Phyllis's loyalty to him is misplaced.

Matthäus Tina's relationship with loyalty is complicated, too. He feels no great loyalty to the army he serves, preferring to stay late at the **garden wall** with Phyllis rather than to ensure his promotion in rank. He makes the decision to desert England and his battalion, partly because of his homesickness—a kind of loyalty to his country—and partly due to an acute loyalty to his friend, Christoph, who will be sabotaged if Tina does not go through with the plan. Tina is simultaneously loyal and disloyal, and this duplicity, though it comes from a pure longing for home and the desire to do right by his friend, ends fatally for him.

Through these myriad complicated decisions and changes of mind, Hardy implies that loyalty is not a black and white issue. Loyalty given under duress, as it is by Phyllis, does not yield a happy result; disloyalty motivated by selfishness, as shown by Humphrey's actions, can, unfairly, end in satisfaction for the disloyal party. Not even the purest loyalty to one's family, country, or friends, as shown by Matthäus Tina, holds the guarantee of a reward.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE GARDEN WALL

The wall at the bottom of the garden of Phyllis and Dr. Grove's house symbolizes the societal and familial restrictions that keep Phyllis and Matthäus Tina from a life of happiness together. The lovers are kept from each other because of their differences in social class and because of Phyllis's respectable, if unusually drawn-out, engagement to Humphrey. Though these barriers are intangible, they are made concrete by the garden wall, which stands between them every time they see each other, except on the night of their escape. Until that night, physical contact between the lovers only happens when Tina presses Phyllis's hand—an act made riskier by the possibility of someone seeing Matthäus Tina's shadow against the wall.

When Phyllis's father, wary of Phyllis's trysts with the German soldier, commands her never to venture past the garden wall without his permission, the wall becomes a symbol of his control over her. It's no longer simply a wall between two fields—it's now the wall that imprisons Phyllis and keeps her from reaching what her heart desires.

However, Hardy implies that the garden wall is perhaps not as sturdy as it might appear—it is built out of rubble without any mortar holding it together, and has many small nooks for Phyllis's toes to grip as she climbs it. Its fragility and its ability to be climbed suggest that the societal and familial restrictions it symbolizes are similarly fragile, and not altogether insurmountable.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Fiddler of the Reels and Other Stories: 1888-1900* published in 2003.

## Part 1 Quotes

☞ The oblivion which in her modesty and humility she courted for herself has only partially fallen on her, with the unfortunate result of inflicting an injustice upon her memory; since such fragments of her story as got abroad at the time, and have been kept alive ever since, are precisely those which are most unfavourable to her character.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove

**Related Themes:** 


**Page Number:** 4

## Explanation and Analysis

The narrator provides some context for the story he is about to tell for the first time. The reason that the story has not been told before is that Phyllis, the woman at its center, was so humble and reserved and wished to keep the details of her life private. However, the result of Phyllis's secrecy was that only the most scandalous details of what happened those 90 years ago in this part of the countryside slipped out and were spread around by gossip and rumor. The partial story was more damaging to Phyllis's reputation than the whole story would have been, and the narrator sees this as an unfair representation of Phyllis. The narrator's explanation, here at the beginning of the story, hints at his sympathies for Phyllis, and implies that his narration will contain subtle details that allow her intentions and decisions to be properly understood.

☞ The daughter's seclusion was great, but beyond the seclusion of the girl lay the seclusion of the father. If her social condition was twilight, his was darkness. Yet he enjoyed his darkness, while her twilight oppressed her.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Dr. Grove/Phyllis's Father

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 4

## Explanation and Analysis


Phyllis's life in the countryside is a lonely one, but her father is even more solitary than she is. Her seclusion is like "twilight" to her—the time of night when the sun's light has almost disappeared—while her father lives in metaphorical darkness, meaning he does not have a social life at all. But, because this is the lifestyle he has chosen for himself, Dr. Grove enjoys his complete seclusion. Phyllis's near-total darkness, on the other hand, oppresses her because she has not chosen it for herself but has had it forced upon her by her father's selfish choices. It is also perhaps a more difficult darkness for her to endure because it is not absolute. There is hint of hope implied by twilight's glimmer of light, suggesting a freedom from loneliness that Phyllis cannot quite reach. Phyllis's situation reveals just how much power her father exerts over her life and also hints that when she has the opportunity to escape her twilight existence for something better, it will be difficult for her to resist.

## Part 2 Quotes

☞ Ever since her childhood it had been Phyllis's pleasure to clamber up this fence and sit on the top—a feat not so difficult as it may seem, the walls in this district being built of rubble, without mortar, so that there were plenty of crevices for small toes.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 7

## Explanation and Analysis


The garden wall is a place of fond memories for Phyllis. Since she was small, she has been able to climb up and sit on top, achieving mobility and elevation that she has not gained in the rest of her life.

This passage introduces the garden wall as the story's pivotal symbol: a fixture that symbolizes the social barriers keeping Phyllis from freedom and happiness, while also hinting tantalizingly at the possibility of escape. That possibility is emphasized here by the description of the wall's construction. It's full of crevices that make it easy for Phyllis to climb it, and made without mortar, meaning that there is no substance holding the rubble, the little stones, together. These two details suggest that the wall could be fragile or temporary, as could the barriers it represents, or at least it would not be "so difficult as it may seem" to

overcome those barriers if Phyllis made the effort. Indeed, later in the story, Phyllis's habit of climbing the wall almost leads her to find freedom through Matthäus Tina, but it's a freedom she fails to hold onto.

●● Phyllis used to say that his English, though not good, was quite intelligible to her, so that their acquaintance was never hindered by difficulties of speech. Whenever the subject became too delicate, subtle, or tender, for such words of English as were at his command, the eyes no doubt helped out the tongue, and—though this was later on—the lips helped out the eyes. In short this acquaintance, unguardedly made, and rash enough on her part, developed and ripened.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 8

### Explanation and Analysis



Phyllis explains that even though Matthäus Tina is not fluent in English, she can always understand what he means by paying attention to his facial expressions, particularly his eyes. The implication here is that Phyllis and Tina have an exceptionally natural and intimate connection that does not rely on them being from the same place or sharing the same mother tongue.


This passage hints at the idea that potent love holds more power than superficial boundaries, and that Phyllis's feelings for Tina could enable her to find freedom from the constrained life she lives, while simultaneously helping Tina to escape his loneliness and homesickness. This detail of the relationship between the two also shows Phyllis being led "unguardedly" by love instead of cowing to the social pressures—the expectation that she be loyal to Humphrey, and the potential scandal of a relationship with a German soldier—that would otherwise keep her away from Tina. She demonstrates here that she holds some power in the face of social pressure, even if she views her own actions as "rash."

●● The stone wall of necessity made anything like intimacy difficult; and he had never ventured to come, or to ask to come, inside the garden, so that all their conversation had been overtly conducted across this boundary.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove,

Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 9

### Explanation and Analysis

Phyllis and Matthäus Tina only ever meet with the stone garden wall between them, and Tina never even asks to cross the wall. This passage strengthens the symbol of the garden wall as a barrier to freedom, because it's the constant physical barrier between the lovers, and the passage even grants some agency to the wall as the thing that "makes" it difficult for them to be closer to each other. This suggests that both of them share fears and reservations about becoming too affectionate, and that they will find it difficult to overcome the preexisting social and physical structures of the lives they lead in order to find happiness together.

This passage is also significant in developing Matthäus Tina's personality. He will not enter, or even ask to enter, Phyllis's garden, which suggests he respects her safety, comfort, and reputation more than he values his own happiness and satisfaction. This feature of Tina's character sets him apart from the other main male characters in the story, Dr. Grove and Humphrey, who are decidedly more self-serving. It also distinguishes him from Dr. Grove and Humphrey as a man who shows consideration for the security and happiness of women. Instead of taking advantage of Phyllis's gentle nature, as Dr. Grove and Humphrey both do, he proves himself to be similarly gentle.

## Part 3 Quotes

●● This account—though only a piece of hearsay, and as such entitled to no absolute credit—tallied so well with the infrequency of his letters and their lack of warmth, that Phyllis did not doubt its truth for one moment; and from that hour she felt herself free to bestow her heart as she should choose. Not so her father; he declared the whole story to be a fabrication.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Humphrey Gould, Dr. Grove/Phyllis's Father

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 9-10

### Explanation and Analysis

When Phyllis and her father hear the rumor that Humphrey may no longer intend to honor the engagement between Phyllis and himself, they react in opposite ways. Phyllis interprets the rumor as truth, partly because it seems to align with the clues she's received about Humphrey's attitude to her—sending letters that lack affection, and staying away for a long period of time—and partly because it would give her permission to show affection to Matthäus Tina, the man she loves. Her father denounces the rumor as a lie, choosing instead to believe in Humphrey's honor.

In this moment, Phyllis feels free. She no longer has to attempt to find things to admire about Humphrey, and can instead act on her true feelings of love for Tina. Similarly to the climax of the story, this is an action Phyllis takes that is completely internal: her feeling of freedom is not because she's become engaged to Tina or left the countryside, but because she feels she can decide where her love belongs. It's a feeling that doesn't last long, because her father disagrees so wholeheartedly that she begins to doubt her interpretation. Nevertheless, there's a glimmer of hope in this moment.

●● Phyllis had not the smallest intention of disobeying him in her actions, but she assumed herself to be independent with respect to her feelings. She no longer checked her fancy for the Hussar, though she was far from regarding him as her lover in the serious sense in which an Englishman might have been regarded as such. The young foreign soldier was almost an ideal being to her, with none of the appurtenances of an ordinary house-dweller; one who had descended she knew not whither; the subject of a fascinating dream—no more.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier, Dr. Grove/Phyllis's Father

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

Phyllis does not intend to directly disobey her father, who, suspecting she's forming a relationship with a German soldier, has instructed her never to go further than the garden wall. However, she does not consider her father to be in control of her feelings, so she allows her affection for Matthäus Tina to grow.



This passage demonstrates that Phyllis views her inner and outer lives as separate. Her inner life—her thoughts, feelings, and some of her decisions—belongs only to her, and she has power and authority there. Her outer life—the place of tangible actions and consequences—is ruled by others, particularly her father. She considers herself able to exist in her inner life, letting love grow and cutting off her emotional tie to Humphrey, without attracting real consequences.

Phyllis seems to think of Tina as a character in her inner life, “an ideal being” instead of a real, breathing person. To her, he could be a dream—the passage suggests it may make no difference to her whether he is a figment of her imagination or not. This means she does not fully consider the possibilities or consequences of their love for each other. It's implied, therefore, that Phyllis's power in her own life does not affect anything outside her own mind: she is not in control of any of her actions, nor of their consequences, and ultimately cannot direct the path her life takes.

●● “My dear friend, please do forget me: I fear I am ruining you and your prospects!”

“Not at all!” said he. “You are giving this country of yours just sufficient interest to me to make me care to keep alive in it. If my dear land were here also, and my old parent, with you, I could be happy as I am, and would do my best as a soldier. But it is not so.”

**Related Characters:** Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 12

### Explanation and Analysis

When Matthäus Tina is demoted as a punishment for returning to camp late due to staying too long with Phyllis, Phyllis is distraught. She claims responsibility for Tina's punishment and begs him to “forget” her and to prioritize his military status and future prospects. Tina responds by saying he is only able to survive as a German soldier in England because of his relationship with Phyllis: if he were English and his mother lived here, he would be both a happy man and a devoted soldier.

However, because Tina is loyal to the desires of his heart, he is not motivated to excel as a soldier. His life depends on the people he loves, including Phyllis, and as a homesick outsider, his military status does not provide him any



happiness.

This conversation between Phyllis and Matthäus Tina highlights their different priorities. Phyllis is desperate not to bring Tina disrepute or to prevent him from a promotion, and she seems willing to abandon her relationship with him in order to ensure his status and reputation. Meanwhile, Tina seems willing, if not eager, to abandon his duties as a soldier in order to be with the people he cares about. Social pressures appear to press on Phyllis more firmly, while Tina is able to disregard them.

## Part 4 Quotes

Without him her life seemed a dreary prospect, yet the more she looked at his proposal the more she feared to accept it—so wild as it was, so vague, so venturesome. She had promised Humphrey Gould, and it was only his assumed faithlessness which had led her to treat that promise as nought. His solicitude in bringing her these gifts touched her; her promise must be kept, and esteem must take the place of love. She would preserve her self-respect. She would stay at home, and marry him, and suffer.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier, Humphrey Gould

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage is the climactic moment in which Phyllis weighs up her options and decides her life's path. She has interpreted Humphrey's conversation with his friend to mean that he has in fact been fully intending to marry her, and she believes she has been wrong to doubt him. Because she believes Humphrey has been faithful, she decides she must be faithful to him in return, and cannot escape with Matthäus Tina.

Phyllis's decision here is the most tangible decision she makes throughout the story, and the only one that has a clear, irreversible consequence in her life. It's a moment that underscores the danger of incomplete, fragmented rumor. Phyllis takes what she overhears from Humphrey's conversation to mean that he has been faithful, when in fact he has become secretly married to someone else, and he is only returning with a gift to ask her a favor related to this secret marriage. Her interpretation of a few of Humphrey's sentences is her reason for giving up the possibility of a

happy life with Matthäus Tina.

Further, this decision further confirms the power that social expectations of women—to marry well, and to remain patient and loyal—have on Phyllis. She is so afraid of Tina's "wild," "vague" plan and the effect it could have on her reputation that she consciously chooses a "dreary" life. Phyllis values her self-respect more than her happiness, and in this moment she makes the decision to be unhappy.

She looked into it, saw how heavy her eyes were, and endeavoured to brighten them. She was in that wretched state of mind which leads a woman to move mechanically onward in what she conceives to be her allotted path. Mr Humphrey had, in his undemonstrative way, been adhering all along to the old understanding; it was for her to do the same, and to say not a word of her own lapse.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Humphrey Gould

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 10

### Explanation and Analysis

Phyllis looks into the mirror Humphrey has brought her and notices "how heavy her eyes [are]" from sadness, exhaustion, and resignation to her dull fate. She attempts to brighten her expression: Humphrey, she believes, has been acting honorably, and she should stop resisting the idea of a life with him.


In this moment, Phyllis has lost all control over her own life. Her "wretched state of mind" leaves no room for the escape of her imagination, and she can't do anything but carry out the tasks expected of her as an engaged woman with a predestined life. Her failed escape with Matthäus Tina is described as a "lapse," emphasizing that Phyllis believes that her intimacy with Tina was an error, and that she is now following the correct and honorable path—the one expected of her by others. This quote emphasizes just how much Phyllis accepts and believes in the role imposed upon her by society and particularly by her father—she is willing to go against her own happiness in order to do, even "mechanically," what has been "allotted" to her, not what she genuinely wants.

## Part 5 Quotes

☞☞ The spot at the bottom of the garden where she had been accustomed to climb the wall to meet Matthäus, was the only inch of English ground in which she took any interest; and in spite of the disagreeable haze prevailing she walked out there till she reached the well-known corner. [...] She observed that her frequent visits to this corner had quite trodden down the grass in the angle of the wall, and left marks of garden soil on the stepping-stones by which she had mounted to look over the top. Seldom having gone there till dusk, she had not considered that her traces might be visible by day.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 18-19

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Humphrey's revelation, Phyllis does not leave the house for days. In this passage, she finally goes outside to walk to the wall at the bottom of the garden, where she sees the tangible proof of their meetings: a flattened patch of grass, and dirt on the parts of the wall she climbed.

This passage shows that any fond feelings Phyllis has of the place she lives have become bound up in her love for Matthäus Tina—the only part of England she now cares about is the very small patch of ground she associates with their relationship. It's a similar attitude to the one Matthäus Tina holds, feeling no loyalty to England except in his love for Phyllis. Now that she has lost Tina, Phyllis feels like a foreigner in her own country.

This is the first time Phyllis realizes her habit of meeting Tina by the wall has left visible marks that others—such as her father—could see. Until now, her whole experience with Tina has been under cover of darkness, much like a dream. In this moment, just before Matthäus Tina is shot, she realizes that her love has had real consequences, both for herself and for her lover.

☞☞ Their graves were dug at the back of the little church, near the wall. There is no memorial to mark the spot, but Phyllis pointed it out to me. While she lived she used to keep their mounds neat; but now they are overgrown with nettles, and sunk nearly flat. The older villagers, however, who know of the episode from their parents, still recollect the place where the soldiers lie. Phyllis lies near.

**Related Characters:** Narrator (speaker), Phyllis Grove, Matthäus Tina/German Hussar/Soldier, Christoph

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 21

**Explanation and Analysis**

The narrator describes the unmarked graves of Matthäus Tina and Christoph in the local parish yard. When she was alive, Phyllis tended to the soldiers' graves, but now that she has died, and has been buried close by, they are covered with weeds. So much time has passed that only the older villagers have had the story passed down to them by their parents.

Matthäus Tina and Christoph, as this passage suggests, never find their freedom—not even in death. Their burial in a small parish yard in a foreign country is the resounding proof of their captivity, emphasized further by the fact that their graves are unmarked and will soon be forgotten even by the locals. The final sentence of the story, “Phyllis lies near,” is a short and hollow reflection of the emptiness of Phyllis's life, while also serving to connect these three characters who never resolved their feelings of loneliness or their wish to escape their circumstances.

This passage also highlights that none of these three characters were especially cared for or seen as important by those around them. Phyllis was the only one who tended to the soldiers' graves; unmarked, they'll be forgotten within a generation. The final sentence is sparse and abrupt, implying that Phyllis's grave may also go untended or unnoticed, or at least has had no special adornment—it simply exists. These tragic details are presented in a quiet, mundane way, in Hardy's trademark realist style.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART 1

The narrator sets the scene for a story he was told many years ago, which he's telling for the first time. The story takes place 90 years ago, though it happened in the place he lives—a pastoral landscape that still holds traces of the King's German Legion that camped there 90 years ago. This part of the countryside was virtually empty until the King decided to make yearly visits to a nearby seaside town. Now, in the time of the narrator's tale, battalions have “descended in a cloud” upon the countryside.

Phyllis Grove, the narrator's source for this tale, is a solitary young woman who lives with her even more solitary father, Dr. Grove, in this part of the countryside. Her father's habit of secluded meditation means he no longer makes enough money to afford to live in a town, so they've relocated to a rundown country house. Phyllis, despite her debilitating shyness, receives a shocking proposal from Humphrey Gould. Humphrey is unremarkable in every way, yet he's a remarkable match for Phyllis, given his respectable family. Their match is unequal by society's rules, due to their differences of rank, but in reality, Humphrey is “as poor as a crow” and there is no practical difference in their financial situations.

They delay their wedding, and Humphrey cites his lack of money as the reason. Winter approaches and he leaves the country for Bath, promising Phyllis he'll return in a few weeks. But Humphrey postpones his return, claiming he needs to look after his father in Bath. He sends letters, but they are consistently formal. Summer arrives, and Humphrey still hasn't returned. Given the absence of her betrothed, and the lack of passion she feels for him, Phyllis experiences “an indescribable dreariness.” Perhaps it will be interrupted by the presence of the York Hussars in the village.

*The fact that the narrator has not told this story until now—90 years after it happened, and several years after he heard it himself—creates an air of mystery. The reader wonders why the story was kept secret for so long. This sense of anticipation is increased by the ominous idea that soldiers arriving in this part of a country is like a cloud, implying that what follows could be as chaotic and damaging as a storm.*



*Phyllis lives in the countryside not by choice but because of her father's self-indulgence, signaling both that she lives under her father's control, and that he tends to disregard her wants and needs. The fact that they have relocated here by necessity also means that Phyllis does not necessarily feel a great sense of belonging in the countryside. That others are shocked by Phyllis's engagement to Humphrey reveals that their difference in rank is dramatic. But Phyllis's lukewarm feelings about her betrothed, and the description of him as a dull man, foreshadow the unaffectionate and drawn-out engagement to come, and suggest that a respectable marriage is not necessarily a happy one. Humphrey's comparison to a crow also implies that he is capable of cunning, and that he may have hidden intentions.*



*Humphrey's attitude towards the engagement is revealed by his actions. He promises that he will return, but does not do so with any urgency, instead providing excuses for staying away. He also sends letters, signaling his continued commitment to Phyllis, but the letters themselves lack warmth and tenderness. It's possible that Humphrey feels as hesitant about the engagement as Phyllis does, but is unwilling to break it off formally, possibly because he does not want to create a scandal. The mention of the York Hussars at the very end of this section alerts the reader once again to the impending changes the soldiers will bring, both to the countryside and to the people within it.*



## PART 2

The York Hussars, who have just arrived in this part of the country, are admired wherever they go for their stunning uniforms, horses, and their “foreign air.” They have come to camp in the part of the countryside where Phyllis lives. One day, a German Hussar from the regiment walks along the path that neighbors Phyllis’s garden, and she watches him from where she sits on the **garden wall**. Phyllis is surprised by the soldier’s melancholic expression. Until now, she’d thought that military men were generally happy people. As the soldier passes by, he raises his glance and, unprepared to see a bare-shouldered woman wearing such a low-cut gown, he blushes and walks on without saying a word.

Phyllis thinks about the soldier all day. She can’t get his face—“so striking, so handsome, and his eyes [...] so blue”—out of her mind. So, the next day, she waits by the **wall** at the same time. This time, the soldier seems to expect her there. When he passes, Phyllis asks him what he’s reading, and he answers that he’s reading letters from his mother in Germany. He does not receive letters from her often, so he’s reading the old letters again.

Phyllis and the soldier continue to converse over the **garden wall** in the following days. Though the German soldier is far from fluent in English, Phyllis understands him well, and when the subject becomes more tender or personal, she believes his eyes (and, later, his lips) help her to comprehend what he means. Phyllis learns that the soldier’s name is Matthäus Tina, he is 22, he holds the rank of corporal, and his hometown in Germany is Saarbrück, where his mother still lives. Phyllis also learns, to her surprise, that the soldier and his regiment are all deeply homesick—they hate living in England, and they want to go back to Germany. Though Phyllis is moved by what she learns, she keeps her distance from Matthäus Tina. They continue to interact only as friends, and only on opposite sides of the garden wall.

*The difference between the soldier’s ornate uniform and his obvious sadness subverts Phyllis’s expectations of the army: what she sees up close is much less flashy and impressive than the reputation of the military has led her to believe. The soldier’s reaction to Phyllis—his blushing and silence—is very similar to the way her shy behavior towards others has been described, and this similarity creates an immediate, implicit link between the two.*



*This description of the soldier is rhythmic, repetitive, and lyrical—a stark contrast to the earlier description of Humphrey as having no particularly special features. Phyllis is clearly more attracted to the soldier than she was to Humphrey. The soldier’s revelation that he’s reading old letters from his mother suggests that he feels comfortable sharing intimate details with Phyllis, and that he has a close relationship with his mother, despite being separated from her by distance.*



*The garden wall is always between Phyllis and Matthäus Tina when they meet, suggesting there’s a substantial obstacle between the two becoming closer to each other (Phyllis’s engagement being an obvious one). Phyllis’s belief that she can understand Matthäus Tina despite his limited English is a sign that she feels a deep connection to him. It’s clear that Tina feels similarly. He trusts Phyllis enough to tell her not only the details of his life, but to share that he and his fellow soldiers hate serving in England—an idea that might be interpreted as disloyalty to his military office.*



## PART 3

Phyllis hears a rumor that her betrothed, Humphrey, does not consider the engagement between them to be completely official. Allegedly, he's been telling people that he might be looking for a match elsewhere. Though the rumor is only hearsay, Phyllis accepts it as the truth. She decides that this new information, along with Humphrey's sparse and formal letters to her, frees her from the engagement. However, Phyllis's father disagrees: he believes that the rumor is untrue, that Humphrey is an honorable man, and that the engagement is intact. He tells Phyllis he has noticed her **garden wall** conversations with Matthäus Tina, and he suspects she's looking for an excuse to keep leading the soldier on. He warns her never to venture past the garden wall.

Though Phyllis does not plan to disobey her father, she believes herself in control of her own feelings and lowers her guard against Matthäus Tina. They meet almost every day at dusk, and she notices him becoming more tender and affectionate with her, pressing her hand each time they part. One night, he holds her hand for such a long time that she worries someone might see them.

The next night, Phyllis does not appear at the **wall** at the usual time. Matthäus Tina waits for her even after the trumpets have sounded to signal the closing of camp. When she finally arrives, she begs him to leave, knowing he risks demotion for his late return. He tells her he doesn't care—the only people that matter to him are Phyllis and his mother, and he would rather spend time with them than gain any higher rank in the army.

The next time Phyllis sees Matthäus Tina, he has been demoted from corporal to private for his late return to camp. Phyllis is distressed, believing the demotion is her fault, but Tina comforts her. He tells her that his plans do not depend on military rank. Phyllis's father would not allow him to marry her if they remained in England, so Tina wishes to take Phyllis to marry and live in Germany.

*Phyllis and her father's contrary interpretations of the rumor about Humphrey show that they desire different things: Phyllis wants to free herself from the imminent and inevitably dull marriage, while Dr. Grove is adamant that it will go ahead. Their different reactions also show that Phyllis's father admires and respects Humphrey more than Phyllis does. Dr. Grove's warning here is a sign that his control over Phyllis extends to restrictions over both her decisions and her physical movements.*



*Phyllis remains loyal to her father by remaining within the confines of the garden, yet her continued conversations with Matthäus Tina show that she can exert control over her own life in very small ways. However, her courage has not caught up with her desire, and she is still scared that her and her lover's reputations could be damaged by just holding hands.*



*Matthäus Tina is willing to risk punishment or demotion to spend a brief moment with Phyllis, showing that his loyalty lies with the one he loves, not the office he holds. Because she begs him to leave, it's implied that Phyllis is not as bold as Tina.*



*Phyllis is shown to be more preoccupied with her and her lover's current circumstances and the immediate repercussions of their actions, while Matthäus Tina is focused only on his end goal of returning to his mother and his homeland and being able to marry Phyllis. It seems he is not as worried about perception and reputation as Phyllis is.*



Because Phyllis is unhappy within the confines of her father's house, and does not feel a great sense of belonging in this part of the countryside, she does not immediately resist Matthäus Tina's plan. He shares more details with her: the regiment will soon be leaving the area, and he will escape with his friend, Christoph, one night in the next week, meet Phyllis on the highway, and take a boat from the harbor to row to the French coast. Tina reassures Phyllis that this won't be a scandalous elopement, because his friend will be with them. His careful planning convinces Phyllis that the escape is viable, but the idea still frightens her.

Soon, however, Phyllis's father confronts Phyllis about her meetings with Matthäus Tina, and tells her she'll be going to stay at her aunt's house until the York Hussars have left their nearby camp. Phyllis's aunt's house is like a prison to her, and her spirits sink as her father tells her what to pack. She becomes so disheartened that she decides to go along with Matthäus Tina's escape plan.

## PART 4

One night the following week, Phyllis, Matthäus Tina, and Christoph make their escape. The plan is for Tina to meet Phyllis at the fork in the highway, while Christoph will collect a boat from the harbor and row it to the meeting point over the hill. As soon as Phyllis's father goes to his room, Phyllis leaves the house and walks to the meeting point on the highway.

Phyllis is hiding behind a fence on the highway, waiting for Matthäus Tina, when a stage-coach comes down the hill and stops a few yards away from her. Two passengers alight, and Phyllis recognizes one of them as her betrothed, Humphrey. The other is his friend. As they're waiting for a man with a horse and trap to collect them, Phyllis hears Humphrey saying that he has returned to the countryside to bring Phyllis a gift. He describes it to his friend as a "peace-offering," saying that Phyllis deserves it, as he's treated her so badly. Humphrey goes on to mention that he's heard a rumor about Phyllis becoming involved with one of the visiting soldiers, but that he doesn't believe "a girl of her good wit" would do such a thing.

*Phyllis's daily life is so restrictive and frustrating that she is willing to consider risking physical danger and serious damage to her reputation—which is even more striking given her timidity. Further, Tina must assume Phyllis is loyal to him, as he trusts her enough to share the details of his plan—details which, if shared, would inevitably lead to severe punishment. While Tina's desire to escape is emotionally driven, his careful planning and the cooperation of his friend prove that he is not totally reckless.*



*As Phyllis draws closer to achieving happiness, her father's behavior grows even more oppressive, highlighting the fact that Dr. Grove cares about his reputation more than his daughter's happiness. However, the more restricted Phyllis is, the more her desire to escape grows, so much that she summons enough bravery to agree to Tina's plan.*



*This plan requires Phyllis to take the initiative to leave of her own accord, and over the course of her relationship with Tina, she has obviously become bold enough to do so—of course, only when her father cannot immediately stop her.*



*It's clear by what Humphrey says that he knows he has not been treating Phyllis the way a betrothed should—though his remedy for this, a gift, is rather superficial, implying that he does not greatly value Phyllis's emotions or consider her to be a complicated person. Humphrey's language also suggests that if Phyllis really has been forming a relationship with a soldier, it would mean that, in his view, she has been acting rashly and without common sense. However, he has taken for granted thus far that Phyllis has been loyal to him, and this assumption leads him to discredit the rumor.*



Phyllis suddenly realizes that her behavior—her relationship with Tina and her plan to escape—will be seen as a great scandal. She regrets believing the rumor that Humphrey had broken their engagement, and understands now that he has been planning to return and honor their agreement. She resolves to “stay at home, and marry him, and suffer.” She waits for Matthäus Tina to reach their agreed meeting spot, so that she can explain her decision. When Tina arrives, he does not attempt to convince Phyllis to come with him, though he is saddened to leave her. Phyllis begs Tina to remain in England, but he cannot abandon Christoph or leave his mother waiting for him, so he continues with the escape.

*Phyllis makes the decision not to escape with Tina, not because she does not love him, or because she is worried about her own physical safety, but because she is cowed by the idea of scandal and damage to her reputation. This is the climax of the story, though the climactic action is only occurring in Phyllis’s thoughts. She realizes now that her actions, which have been propelled by her desire for freedom, love, and happiness, are directly at odds with what will be judged as appropriate behavior for a young woman. That this societal judgment is enough to make Phyllis forfeit her happiness shows that it is a formidable, if intangible, force. Tina will not attempt to convince or coerce Phyllis into coming along, which again sets him apart from Humphrey (whose gift for Phyllis is a form of coercion). Nor will he allow Phyllis’s decision to interfere with the loyalty he feels to his friend and his mother.*



Phyllis watches Matthäus Tina walking away and eventually meeting Christoph further down the highway. She is tempted for a moment to rush forward and go with him, but her courage fails her, and she returns home instead. The next morning, Phyllis’s father is excited to inform her, “triumphantly,” that Humphrey has brought her a gift and will return again soon to walk with her. The gift is a mirror in an ornate frame, which Phyllis admires. When she looks into the mirror, she realizes her sadness is visible. Resolving to appear happier, and to stop resisting her engagement and her future, she brightens her eyes, dresses for her walk, and waits for Humphrey at the door.

*Phyllis’s temptation to run after Tina despite the decision she has made not to go with him shows that there is a possibility, if only slight, for her—or for any young woman—to disregard social expectations if she finds enough courage to do so. The description of Dr. Grove as “triumphant” is a sign that his desire for Phyllis’s respectable marriage to Humphrey has won out over Phyllis’s own aspirations of happiness and love. Humphrey’s gift of the mirror adds to the image the reader has of Humphrey as a self-interested person. When Phyllis looks into it, she sees only what truly exists: her own image, exhausted and upset. She resolves to make the best of her reality, in which her only option is to appease Humphrey and her father, and to ensure her appearance suits that goal.*



## PART 5

Phyllis and Humphrey go for a walk. The conversation is mostly led by Humphrey, which gives Phyllis time to calm herself down. She is surprised when he changes the subject from more impersonal topics of fashion to the matter of a difficulty he is experiencing. He reveals he brought Phyllis the mirror as a gift in order to ask her a favor. He has secretly married someone else, and, because his father will not fully approve of his bride, he needs Phyllis to claim that she never would have married him. Phyllis is relieved by this news. She wants to confide in Humphrey about Matthäus Tina but knows she must not—especially because keeping his escape a secret will grant him more time to succeed.

*Humphrey’s selfishness is emphasized—he talks so much, Phyllis is hardly able to get a word in. It’s also implied here that he has thought so little about Phyllis’s own desires that he can share his secret marriage with her and ask her for a favor without worrying she’ll be angry. Clearly, he has spent his time away working towards his own happiness, and using his engagement with Phyllis as a useful cover story. Phyllis does not express any emotion to Humphrey, once again setting this relationship apart from her conversations with Matthäus Tina, in which many intimate details were shared. Her relief confirms her lack of interest in the marriage, and her silence about Tina, despite wanting to share her story, shows that she is still loyal to him even when there is no longer any hope of happiness together.*



Phyllis returns home, halfheartedly regretting her decision not to leave with Matthäus Tina. Wrapped up in her sadness, she doesn't leave the house for a few days. One morning, though, she ventures down to the bottom of the garden, where she used to meet Tina at the **wall**. She notices that the grass near the wall has been flattened by her habit, and that it might be this that alerted her father to the meetings between the two.

While at the **garden wall**, Phyllis hears unusual noises coming from the military camp. She is shocked to see the regiments standing in lines behind two empty coffins. A procession advances while the army band plays a death march; Phyllis sees two soldiers in a mourning coach along with two priests. The two men are blindfolded and made to kneel on the coffins while the procession pauses. Twenty-four men stand with guns raised, and when the commanding officer signals, they fire at the two kneeling soldiers. Phyllis sees one of them fall forwards, the other backwards. When the soldiers, later revealed to be Matthäus Tina and Christoph, are shot, Phyllis shrieks and falls to the ground, though nobody past the garden wall notices.

The executed soldiers are placed in the coffins, but the English colonel of the regiment demands that they be turned out onto the ground as an example for the other soldiers to march past. After this, the bodies are once again placed in the coffins and taken away. Dr. Grove, hearing the sound of gunfire, rushes out into the garden where he finds Phyllis lying against the **wall**, unmoving. Phyllis is taken indoors, but remains unconscious for a long time and is not her normal self for weeks.

It transpires that Matthäus Tina and Christoph made it to the boat, but navigated to Jersey instead of France in error. There, they were caught along with two other soldiers who escaped along with them. In their trial, Tina and Christoph claimed full responsibility for the desertion, allowing the other two soldiers to have their sentences commuted to flogging while they themselves were given the death penalty.

*After her heartbreak, the first time Phyllis leaves the house is to visit the place she associates with Matthäus Tina, suggesting her feelings for him remain and have become tangible and permanent, attached to the stone wall. In the light of day, she's able to see the concrete effects of her trysts with Tina, implying that she has come to realize both the depth of their connection, and her inability to keep it secret.*



*Phyllis's reaction to the soldiers being shot is based on an unconfirmed, yet well-informed assumption that the soldiers are Matthäus Tina and Christoph, though neither she nor the reader are completely sure of this fact until the narrator provides the information. Nevertheless, Phyllis's faint is the most dramatic and emotional way she behaves in the story, far surpassing her reaction to Humphrey's revelation. Even though Phyllis made the decision to remain loyal to Humphrey, and to give up her life with Tina, her emotional connection to Tina is still so intense it affects her physically.*



*Matthäus Tina's desertion is not only punished with death, but is extreme enough to serve as an example to the other soldiers in the legion. This is the final and most profound implication that his longing for home was extreme, and took precedence over any other loyalty. It seems to take the sound of gunfire for Dr. Grove to pay attention to his daughter, only showing her care when she is at the point of collapse.*



*The escape ended in failure not due to betrayal but through an innocent mistake, which makes it seem inevitable that Matthäus Tina would never find the freedom he longed for. Even in the face of death, though, he and his friend were unwilling to betray others, accepting the consequences of their actions without attempting to implicate others—something Tina also did when he refused to persuade Phyllis to come with him, and something Humphrey failed to do by requiring Phyllis to help him evade his father's expectations.*





Their unmarked graves lie next to each other in the churchyard, a place the narrator only knows because Phyllis showed him. Phyllis keeps the graves well-maintained for the rest of her life. The narrator returns the story to the present time, and describes the graves as overgrown, with Phyllis's own grave now nearby. A generation has passed, and only the older villagers know the significance of the graves.

*Without Phyllis to attend to them, the soldiers' graves are unkempt, which suggests that Phyllis was the only one in the surrounding area, or in the country, to care about them. This also emphasizes the loneliness and alienation the soldiers felt in England, and their tragic inability to escape, even in death. That Phyllis did tend the graves over the course of her life, though, is a sign that she was bold enough to show her devotion by her actions—just not at the point when it mattered most. The graves are unmarked, meaning the only people who know of their importance are those who know the 90-year-old story or those who read the parish records. It's a reminder that this tale, and others from that time and place, are close to slipping from collective memory.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

van Waardenberg, Sophie. "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 19 Sep 2022. Web. 19 Sep 2022.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

van Waardenberg, Sophie. "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion." LitCharts LLC, September 19, 2022. Retrieved September 19, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-melancholy-hussar-of-the-german-legion>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Hardy, Thomas. *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*. Penguin Classics. 2003.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Hardy, Thomas. *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*. London: Penguin Classics. 2003.