

**TWO ON A TOWER. A
ROMANCE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Two on a Tower. A Romance. In Three Volumes. Vol. I by Thomas Hardy

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THOMAS HARDY

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VOL. I.

TWO ON A TOWER.

A Romance.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TWO ON A TOWER.

CHAPTER I.

ON an early winter afternoon, clear but not cold, when the vegetable world was a weird multitude of skeletons through whose ribs the sun shone freely, a gleaming landau came to a pause on the crest of a hill in Wessex. The spot was where the old Melchester Road, which the carriage had hitherto followed, was joined by a drive that led round into a park at no great distance off.

The footman alighted, and went to the occupant of the carriage, a lady about eight- or nine-and-twenty. She was looking

through the opening afforded by a field-gate at the undulating stretch of country beyond. In pursuance of some remark from her the servant looked in the same direction.

The central feature of the middle distance, as they beheld it, was a circular isolated hill, of no great elevation, which placed itself in strong chromatic contrast with a wide acreage of surrounding arable by being covered with fir-trees. The trees were all of one size and age, so that their tips assumed the precise curve of the hill they grew upon. This pine-clad protuberance was yet further marked out from the general landscape by having on its summit a tower in the form of a classical column, which, though partly immersed in the plantation, rose above the tree-tops to a considerable height. Upon this object the eyes of lady and servant were bent.

"Then there is no road leading near it?" she asked.

"Nothing nearer than where we are now, my lady."

"Then drive home," she said after a moment. And the carriage rolled on its way.

A few days later, the same lady, in the same carriage, passed that spot again. Her eyes, as before, turned to the distant tower.

"Nobbs," she said to the coachman, "could you find your way home through that field, so as to get near the outskirts of the plantation where the column is?"

The coachman regarded the field. "Well, my lady," he observed, "in dry weather we might drive in there by inching and pinching, and so get across by Five-and-Twenty Acres, all being well. But the ground is so heavy after these rains that—perhaps it would hardly be safe to try it now."

"Perhaps not," she assented indifferently. "Remember it, will you, at a drier time?"

And again the carriage sped along the road, the lady's eyes resting on the segmental hill, the blue trees that muffled it, and the column that formed its apex, till they were out of sight.

A long time elapsed before that lady drove over the hill again. It was February; the soil was now unquestionably dry, the weather and scene being in other respects much as they had been before. The familiar shape of the column seemed to remind her that at last an opportunity for a close inspection had arrived. Giving her directions, she saw the gate opened, and after a little manœuvring the carriage swayed slowly into the uneven field.

Although the pillar stood upon the hereditary estate of her husband, the lady had

never visited it, owing to its insulation by this well-nigh impracticable ground. The drive to the base of the hill was tedious and jerky, and on reaching it she alighted, directing that the carriage should be driven back empty over the clods, to wait for her on the nearest edge of the field. She then ascended beneath the trees on foot.

The column now showed itself as a much more important erection than it had appeared from the road, or the park, or the windows of Welland House, her residence hard by, whence she had surveyed it hundreds of times without ever feeling a sufficient interest in its details to investigate them. The column had been erected in the last century, as a substantial memorial of her husband's great-grandfather, a respectable officer who had fallen in the American war, and the reason of her lack of interest was partly owing to her rela-