

Summary:

The story is broadly based on Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The hero's parents sell him into indentured servitude to pay for his sister's wedding. Faced with intolerable conditions he runs away, throwing the debt back on his family. A professor at a technical school recognizes his genius and assists him through the University. While a student, he has a brief affair with an older, French graduate student. He goes to the United States, gets a Masters degree mostly to improve his English, and begins working his way up as a hardware engineer in Silicon Valley. Finally he becomes CEO of successful startup. He grows increasingly sardonic, an engaging combination of bitterness and generosity. He befriends a cheerful Chinese-American engineer to whom he reveals his story and later regrets his frankness. He has a one-night stand with a French Vietnamese interior designer as does the Chinese-American engineer. Beset by many emotional problems, she kills herself. The Chinese-American engineer however is mostly involved with the Jewish-Faroese programmer, who stirs a conflict with his traditional Chinese family. Other important characters include a Japanese engineer who has fled his homeland because of failing at the University there; a Vietnamese who first saw America from a plane in Kansas at age 14; and a successful Indian venture capitalist, who is chairman of the protagonist board. Conversations among engineers who play rock music together serve as a kind of chorus. Bad luck, and his unwillingness to delegate authority begin to burden his enterprise and the board forces him out of his own company. His French lover, now a widow, finds him and tries to reconnect, but he pridefully rejects her. He returns to his native village seeking expiation.