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Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* is a novel that revolves around the concealment and divulging of secrets. Henchard, Susan, Newson and Lucetta all keep secrets, which are revealed throughout the course of the novel. Although Susan is a minor character, she plays a major role in the novel through the concealment of her secret. She hides her daughter Elizabeth Jane's true identity from Henchard, thus allowing him to think she is his daughter. She also keeps the information about her prior relationship with Henchard from Elizabeth Jane, as well as the fact that she had a half-sister that died.

The lack of information strangles the relationship between Henchard and Elizabeth Jane. Although Susan keeps these secrets to protect her daughter, her lack of candor results in the consequences she fears most - her daughter's emotional upheaval. While Susan herself does not reveal the secret, it is disclosed through a letter before the planned time, thus causing Elizabeth Jane's alienation from Henchard. The reader is oblivious to Susan's secret until it is revealed in her letter to Henchard.

Susan chooses to keep Elizabeth Jane's identity a secret because she is afraid of disappointing Henchard. A quiet, unassuming woman, Susan is scared of disappointing others and how they will react when she upsets them. She believes that in order to restore order between her and Henchard she must conceal the truth about Elizabeth Jane. It is hard enough for her to reunite with Henchard and when she is alone in the ring with him, she admits meekly, " I am quite in your hands, Michael...if you tell me to leave again tomorrow morning, and never come near you more, I am content to go" (63).

Susan's speech is reflective of her timid and submissive personality. In addition, when Henchard asks Susan if she forgives him, " she murmured something; but seemed to find it difficult to frame her answer" (64). Susan is unable to show her true feelings because she is afraid of Henchard's reaction. Thus she finds it necessary to keep Elizabeth Jane's birth a secret because she is scared of upsetting Henchard. At the same time that she conceals the identity of Elizabeth Jane's father from Henchard, she hides her connection with Henchard from Elizabeth Jane.

Although many times " she had been upon the point of telling her daughter Elizabeth-Jane the true story of her life" in the end she " had restrained" (20). Susan's choice to leave her daughter in the dark allows Elizabeth Jane to enjoy an innocent childhood, and she is blissfully unaware of her mother's troubles. Susan is afraid of disrupting Elizabeth Jane's equilibrium and cannot bring herself to tell the truth. " The risk of endangering a child's strong affection by disturbing ideas which had grown with her growth was to Mrs. Henchard too fearful a thing to contemplate" (20).

The words " endangering" and " disturbing" highlight Susan's main goal in hiding her secret from Elizabeth Jane and reflect her entire purpose in life. Because Susan is meek and easily controlled, she is afraid to cause a reaction that she cannot control. She is " fearful" of anything beyond the ordinary, including unexpected reactions. This character trait is evident when she first meets Henchard and is surprised by his appearance as mayor. " I don't think I can ever meet Mr. Henchard," she says in shock. " He is not how I thought he would be—he overpowers me!

"I don't wish to see him any more" (29). The sentiments she expresses in this statement illustrate her fear of the unknown, and her easily manipulated nature. Susan uses the word "overpowers" to demonstrate the lack of control she feels in her life and her tendency to be dominated by a superior. In Elizabeth Jane's case, as in her relationship with Henchard, she prefers secrecy over openness because of her fear of upsetting others. Susan's secrets are unexpectedly disclosed to both parties, when she is no longer alive to view the reaction.

Their revelation results in the opposite effect, harming both Henchard and Elizabeth Jane. Susan's greatest desire is to shield her daughter from trouble, but her fear of dealing with the truth ends up bringing on what she dreads most. Susan is overly concerned with appearances and manners, and she fusses about what others will think and say. Susan's letter exhibits her tendency to avoid disappointing and shocking others. Even in her writing one can sense her fright at revealing the news to her husband.

She begins her letter by prefacing "I hope you will understand why" (108). Later on she begs, "Don't curse me, Mike." Although she is only writing and not speaking, she finds it hard to let out her secret, explaining "I can hardly write it." However, despite all of Susan's reservations and hesitations, and intentions to protect her daughter, she ends up harming her. Her worst fears are confirmed when Henchard begins to treat Elizabeth Jane coldly and Elizabeth Jane "lived on, a dumb, deep-feeling, great-eyed creature" (115).

Instead of showering her with warmth and love, Henchard sharply reprimands her when she uses incorrect grammar. "Are you only fit to carry

wash to a pig trough," (114) he yells, degrading Elizabeth Jane and humiliating her. Susan's secret keeping leaves Elizabeth Jane worse off. Her lack of confidence ends up bringing on what she fears most. Hardy uses secrets in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to highlight Susan's character flaw and demonstrate that the situations people fear most are those they ultimately bring upon themselves.

While Susan acts out of a desire to help Elizabeth Jane and Henchard, she ends up harming both of them. The concealment of information from her daughter and husband is what destroys their relationship. Susan's greatest concern is what people will think about her daughter and her top priority is conforming to societal standards. However, her meek personality and constant worrying eventually cause her worst fears to come true. Susan's saga of secret-keeping serves as a warning to readers... concealing the truth will come back to haunt you.