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# FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

THOMAS HARDY



## FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

First published in 1874, this novel was an immediate bestseller. The story takes place in the fields and farms of the quiet English countryside, when harvests were gathered by hand, when carts were pulled by horses, and when people's lives followed the pattern of the changing seasons.

That quiet rural world has long since gone, of course, but the passions that rule people's lives have not changed. Within the everlasting circle of springtime and harvest, love burns as fiercely, as uncontrollably, as ever.

The beautiful Bathsheba Everdene has her own farm and does not need to marry. But she cannot fight off love for ever. There is the shepherd, Gabriel Oak, whose love for Bathsheba is quiet and steady. There is Farmer Boldwood, a serious, middle-aged man, who has never been in love before. And there is Sergeant Troy, a handsome young soldier in his bright red coat . . . Bathsheba is self-confident and independent, but she has much to learn about the violent passions of love.





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*Classics*

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## Far from the Madding Crowd

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Madding Crowd

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THOMAS HARDY

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*Retold by*  
Clare West



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## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Bathsheba Everdene

Mrs Hurst, *her aunt*

Liddy, *Bathsheba's maid*

Maryann, *the cleaning-woman in Bathsheba's house*

Benjy Pennyways, *Bathsheba's farm manager*

Gabriel Oak, *a shepherd*

Farmer William Boldwood, *the owner of a large farm  
in Weatherbury*

Sergeant Frank Troy, *a soldier*

Fanny Robin, *a maidservant*

The maltster, *in Weatherbury village*

Jacob Smallbury, *the maltster's son*

Billy Smallbury, *Jacob's son*

Joseph Poorgrass

Jan Coggan

Laban Tall

} *villagers in Weatherbury*



## Gabriel Oak falls in love



Gabriel Oak was a sensible man of good character, who had been brought up by his father as a shepherd, and then managed to save enough money to rent his own farm on

Norcombe Hill, in Dorset. He was twenty-eight, a tall, well-built man, who did not seem, however, to think his appearance was very important.

One winter morning he was in one of his fields on the side of Norcombe Hill. Looking over his gate, Gabriel could see a yellow cart, loaded with furniture and plants, coming up the road. Right on top of the pile sat a handsome young woman. As Gabriel was watching, the cart stopped at the top of the hill, and the driver climbed down to go back and fetch something that had fallen off.

The girl sat quietly in the sunshine for a few minutes. Then she picked up a parcel lying next to her, and looked round to see if the driver was coming back. There was no sign of him. She unwrapped the parcel, and took out the mirror it contained. The sun shone on her lovely face and hair. Although it was December, she looked almost summery, sitting there in her bright red jacket with the fresh green plants around her. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled, thinking that only the birds could see her. But behind the gate Gabriel Oak was watching too.

'She must be rather vain,' he thought. 'She doesn't need to look in that mirror at all!'

As the girl smiled and blushed at herself, she seemed to be dreaming, dreaming perhaps of men's hearts won and lost. When she heard the driver's footsteps, she packed the mirror away. The cart moved on downhill to the toll-gate. Gabriel followed on foot. As he came closer



he could hear the driver arguing with the gatekeeper.

'My mistress's niece, that's her on top of the furniture, is not going to pay you the extra twopence,' said the driver. 'She says she's offered you quite enough already.'

'Well, if she doesn't pay the toll, your mistress's niece can't pass through the gate,' replied the gatekeeper.

Gabriel thought that twopence did not seem worth bothering about, so he stepped forward. 'Here,' he said, handing the coins to the gatekeeper, 'let the young woman pass.'

The girl in the red jacket looked carelessly down at Gabriel, and told her man to drive on, without even thanking the farmer. Gabriel and the gatekeeper watched the cart move away. 'That's a lovely young woman,' said the gatekeeper.

'But she has her faults,' answered Gabriel.

'True, farmer.'

'And the greatest of them is what it always is with women.'

'Wanting to win the argument every time? Oh, you're right.'

'No, her great fault is that she's vain.'

A few days later, at nearly midnight on the longest night of the year, Gabriel Oak could be heard playing his flute on Norcombe Hill. The sky was so clear and the stars so visible that the earth could almost be seen turning. In that cold, hard air the sweet notes of the flute rang out. The music came from a little hut on wheels, standing in the corner of a field. Shepherds' huts like this are used as a shelter during the winter and spring, when shepherds have to stay out all night in the fields, looking after very young lambs.

Gabriel's two hundred and fifty sheep were not yet paid for. He knew that, in order to make a success of the farming business, he had to make sure they produced a large number of healthy lambs. So he was determined to spend as many nights as necessary in the fields, to save his lambs from dying of cold or hunger.

The hut was warm and quite comfortable inside. There was a stove,



and some bread and beer on a shelf. On each side of the hut was a round hole like a window, which could be closed with a piece of wood. These air-holes were usually kept open when the stove was burning, because too much smoke in a small, airless hut could kill the shepherd.

From time to time the sound of the flute stopped, and Gabriel came out of his hut to check his sheep. Whenever he discovered a half-dead new lamb, he brought the creature into the hut. In front of the stove it soon came back to life, and then he could return it to its mother.

He noticed a light further down the hill. It came from a wooden hut at the edge of a field. He walked down to it and put his eye to a hole in the wood. Inside, two women were feeding a sick cow. One of the women was middle-aged. The other was young and wore a cloak. Gabriel could not see her face.

'I think she'll be all right now, aunt,' said the younger woman. 'I can come and feed her again in the morning. What a pity I lost my hat on the way here!' Just then the girl dropped her cloak, and her long hair fell on to the shoulders of her red jacket. Gabriel recognized the girl of the yellow cart and the mirror, the girl who owed him twopence.

The women left the hut, and Gabriel returned to his sheep.

As the sun was rising the next morning, Gabriel waited outside his hut until he saw the young woman riding up the hill. She was sitting sideways on the horse in the usual lady's position. He suddenly thought of the hat she had lost, searched for it, and found it among some leaves on the ground. He was just going to go up to her to give it back, when the girl did something very strange. Riding under the low branches of a tree, she dropped backwards flat on the horse's back, with her feet on its shoulders. Then, first looking round to make sure no one was watching, she sat up straight again and pulled her dress to her knees, with her legs on either side of the horse. This was obviously easier for riding, but not very ladylike. Gabriel was surprised and amused by her behaviour. He waited until she returned from her aunt's hut, and stepped out into the path in front of her.