



## Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy

### ABOUT THE STORY

Set in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, *Far from the Madding Crowd* tells the story of a beautiful young woman, Bathsheba Everdene, who moves to the countryside to live with her aunt and later inherits her uncle's farm. Over several years, she meets three men of very different characters and backgrounds: Gabriel Oak, a young, poor farmer; Mr Boldwood, a rich landowner; and Sergeant Frank Troy. Although one of the main themes of the novel is love, it also explores how our destiny can be changed either by chance or by the decisions we make.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet, born in Dorset in 1840. He was a Victorian realist: he wrote about the problems people faced in their everyday life in England during the Victorian era, a period from about 1837 to 1901. Rural values were an important theme in Hardy's novels, and there are lots of descriptions of rural life in his work. Other important themes in his novels include injustice, disappointment, destiny, nature and love. Many of his characters are ordinary, working-class rural people; however, a lot of his novels feature strong female characters.



### Chapter 1

## Gabriel Oak

Farmer Gabriel Oak was a quiet, sensible man. He was twenty-eight years old and unmarried. And he was a man of good character. During the week, he worked in the fields of his farm.

5 On a sunny morning in December, Gabriel Oak walked across his field on Norcombe Hill, in the county of Wessex. He looked towards the road which went between Emminster and Chalk-Newton and saw a bright yellow wagon. Two horses  
10 were pulling the heavy wagon slowly along the road. The driver was walking beside the wagon, which was loaded with furniture. A woman was sitting on top of the furniture. She was young and very attractive.

15 Suddenly, the driver called to her. 'Something has fallen off the wagon, miss! I'll go back and get it'.

The young woman waited quietly. She did not get down from the wagon to help the driver. After several minutes, she looked back to see if the  
20 wagon driver was returning. He was not, so she opened a small package that was beside her. She took a mirror from the package and held it up to her face. As she looked in the mirror, she smiled.

The sun shone down on to the woman's red jacket, 25 her pretty face and her dark hair. Gabriel Oak watched her and smiled. The girl did not touch her hat, or her hair. She simply looked at herself and smiled. Then she heard the wagon driver returning to the wagon. She put the mirror into the package  
30 and waited for him to drive the horses forward.

When the wagon moved on, Gabriel Oak followed it to the tollgate. As he came nearer to the wagon, Oak heard the driver arguing with the man at the gate.

'The toll is two pence,' said the gatekeeper. 'But this  
35 wagon is large. You must pay two pence extra.'

But the young woman would not pay the extra money.

Oak thought that two pence was too small an amount to argue about. He held out two pennies to  
40 the gatekeeper.

'Take this and let the young woman go through,' he said.

The young woman looked down at Oak. She did not thank him, but she told her driver to go on. Oak and  
45 the gatekeeper watched her as the wagon passed.

'She's a handsome woman,' said the gatekeeper.

'That's true,' said Oak. 'But unfortunately, she knows it.'

### VOCABULARY FOCUS

**character (line 3):** a person's qualities and reputation, especially when this shows how honest or reliable they are

**wagon (line 9):** a heavy wooden vehicle with four wheels which was pulled by one or more horses.

**loaded (line 12):** carrying a large amount of something

**tollgate (line 32):** a gate across a road where you have to pay before you go through it

**gatekeeper (line 40):** a person who stops people entering through a gate without permission

**handsome (line 46):** someone who has an attractive face

**Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy****Before reading**

1 Look at the title of the novel: *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Read *About the story* and *About the author*. What do you think the 'madding crowd' is? Where do you think 'Far from the madding crowd' might be?

2 Reorganise the words to find three more of Thomas Hardy's novels.

**Obscure**      **Woodlanders**      **The**      **return**  
**Jude**      **The**      **of**  
**the**      **the**      **Native**

- 1 .....  
 2 .....  
 3 .....

3 The title of the first chapter is 'Gabriel Oak', and the first line of the text is: *Farmer Gabriel Oak was a quiet, sensible man*. Try to predict three things about Gabriel.

- 1 .....  
 2 .....  
 3 .....

**While reading**

1 Read Chapter 1 and check if any of your predictions in Before reading, exercise 3 are mentioned.

2 Read the text again. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F)? Correct the false sentences.

- 1 Gabriel noticed the wagon when he was out walking. T / F  
 2 There was not much furniture on the wagon. T / F  
 3 The driver left the wagon to collect some fallen furniture. T / F  
 4 The woman got off and helped the driver. T / F  
 5 The driver and gatekeeper argued because the wagon was too large for the gate. T / F  
 6 Gabriel helped to sort out their problem. T / F

3 Look at the adjectives in the table below. Check you understand each one. Decide if each one describes Gabriel or Bathsheba (the young woman). Write G (Gabriel) or B (Bathsheba).

Adjective	Name	Sentence
pleasant		
stubborn		
hard-working		
lazy		
rude		
vain		
generous		

4 Work in pairs. Read the text again. Find one or more sentences to support each of the adjectives above and complete the table.

**After reading**

1 The author says that Gabriel Oak was 'a man of good character'. What do you think this means? In pairs, make a list of things that someone of good character might say or do.

2 Think about when this novel was set, particularly in relation to the role of women in society. Read two more extracts from the book. In pairs, discuss what these extracts tell us about Bathsheba.

[Bathsheba] 'Yes, aunt; and I'll ride over for it as soon as it is light.'

[Aunt] 'But there's no side-saddle.'

[Bathsheba] 'I can ride on the other side: trust me.'

[Bathsheba] 'I have formed a resolution ... to manage everything with my own head and hands.'

3 You are going to write a paragraph describing the next meeting between Gabriel and Bathsheba. In pairs, brainstorm some things they might say or do in the meeting that are descriptive of their characters.

4 Now write your paragraph. Make sure you include descriptive language to describe the characters of Gabriel and Bathsheba.