

"I felt sorry for Troy when Fanny died. But I felt even more sorry for Bathsheba, who didn't know the truth about Troy and Fanny." Farzia, 12



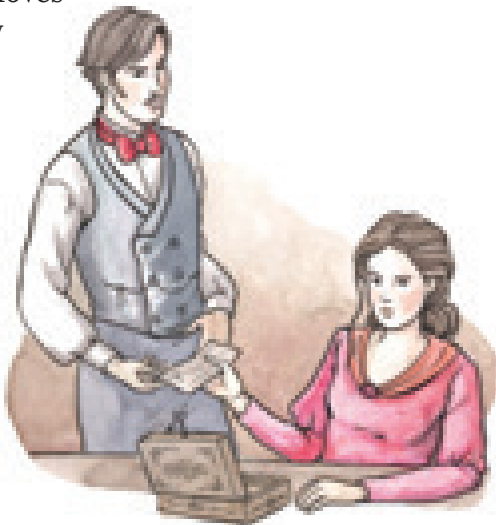
FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

'I cannot allow any man to – to criticise my private conduct!'

Young, attractive and impetuous, Bathsheba has inherited a farm and is determined to be as independent as possible. Her natural beauty is a magnet for men; how will she choose between them?

Gabriel Oak is a young farmer, just set up in business with his own flock of sheep. He meets Bathsheba and falls in love with her, but she turns him down. He has to stand by and watch while the woman he loves is courted by others, first by William Boldwood, much older than Bathsheba; then by Sergeant Troy, young, handsome, and reckless. Who will she choose?

Throughout Bathsheba's series of mistakes, Gabriel remains her loyal friend. But will he ever be more than just a friend?



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FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD Thomas Hardy

THOMAS HARDY

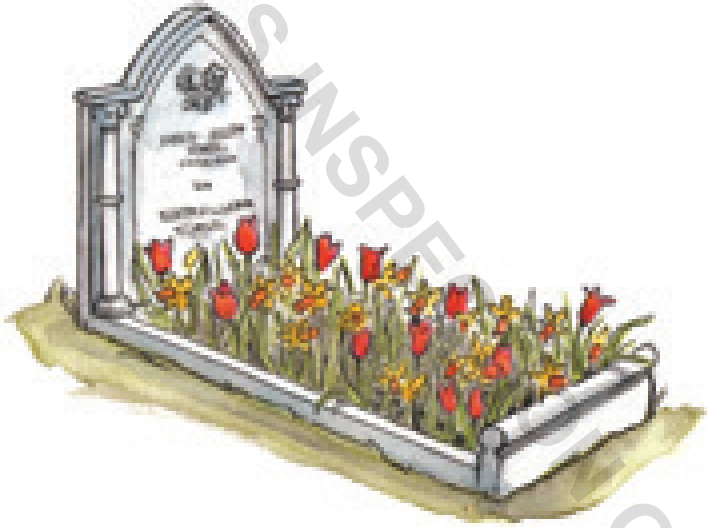


Retold by Maxine Linnell
Illustrated by Ann Kronheimer



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THE CHARACTERS

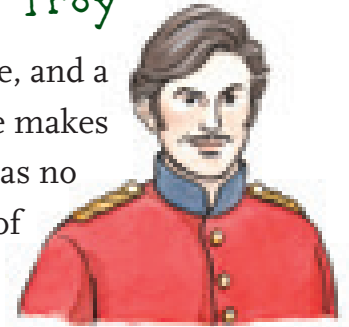
Gabriel Oak

Gabriel is a hard-working young shepherd who has had his share of misfortune. Can he still win the woman of his dreams?



Sergeant Troy

Troy is young, handsome, and a fine swordsman – and he makes the most of his charm. He has no money, but he knows plenty of ways of using other people's, including Bathsheba's.



Bathsheba Everdene

Young, attractive and impetuous, Bathsheba has inherited a farm and is determined to be as independent as possible. Her natural beauty is a magnet for men; how will she choose between them?



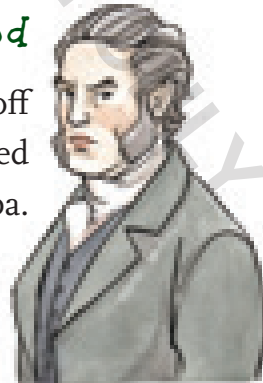
Fanny Robin

A poor servant girl, Fanny is beautiful with long golden hair. She wants nothing more than to marry the dashing Sergeant Troy, but will her story have a happy ending?



Mr Boldwood

Boldwood is a well-off farmer who has never been interested in women until he meets Bathsheba. What is it about her that makes him appear to lose all reason?



Liddy

Bathsheba's faithful maid wants to support her mistress in every way possible. But there are some things that Bathsheba would rather not know. What should Liddy do?





FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

It was only very recently that things had gone so very wrong for Gabriel Oak. Young, strong and handsome, with his own land and a healthy flock of sheep, he had been a shepherd with a bright future. But now everything had changed, and all for the worse. The flock upon which he had built his security was destroyed when his young dog chased the pregnant ewes to their deaths over the edge of a pit, and the love upon which he had built his dreams was destroyed when Bathsheba coldly rejected him. Dashing his hopes still further, Bathsheba had left the village without telling anyone where she was going. Left with nothing but the clothes he wore and his shepherd's crook, Gabriel took to the roads to look for work.

It was dark by the time he reached the village of Weatherbury, but even from some distance away he could see an unusual light above the village.

Drawing closer, he saw that it was the glow of a fire – a straw stack was ablaze. He could hear confused shouts as people made disordered attempts to stop the fire spreading to other stacks close by.

Gabriel ran to help. ‘Get a tarpaulin – quick!’ he shouted. Glad of some direction, the men did as he said. They hung the tarpaulin like a curtain across the space between the burning stack and its neighbours, and kept it wet with buckets of water.

Thoroughly taken up by the urgency of keeping everything under control, Gabriel failed to notice a young lady on a pony, her maid on foot beside her. But they noticed him.

‘Liddy, who is that man?’ asked the lady.

Her maid took a few steps closer. ‘He’s a shepherd,’ she called back. ‘Look – he’s beating the fire out with his crook.’

‘Whose shepherd is he?’

‘Don’t know, ma’am. I don’t recognise him. He’s a stranger.’

‘He appears to have saved my straw stacks. Please go and thank him, Liddy.’

When Liddy conveyed the landowner’s thanks, Gabriel saw an opportunity for work. ‘Where is your master, the farmer?’ he asked.

‘Tisn’t a master, sir – ’tis a mistress.’

‘A woman farmer?’

‘That’s she, on the pony,’ said the woman.

His face blackened and grimy from the smoke, Gabriel walked over to the farmer. When he saw who it was he stopped short. Gabriel and his cold-hearted darling, Bathsheba Everdene, were again face to face. ‘Do you happen to want a shepherd, ma’am?’



Gabriel was hired as bailiff that very night. Turning his back on Bathsheba’s smoking straw, he continued his journey towards the village to find lodgings. As he walked among the shadows of trees, he came upon a slim girl with fair hair who seemed to be hiding behind the trunk of a large tree.

‘Are you all right out here all alone?’ asked Gabriel, concerned.

Back in time

Thomas Hardy was born on 2nd June, 1840, and died on 11th January, 1928. This, his fourth book, was published in 1874 as a serial in *Corn Hill Magazine*, which was edited by Leslie Stephens, the father of the novelist Virginia Woolf. *Far from the Madding Crowd* was printed in short episodes, each designed to leave the reader in suspense until the next issue appeared. Early reviewers compared Hardy's writing with that of George Eliot, the author of *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, and recognised him as an important new voice in English fiction.

Hardy went on to write novels at an extraordinary rate for more than twenty years. His most famous novels written during these years include *The Return of the Native*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. These novels explored important subjects like the position of women in society and the English class system. In dealing with these issues, Hardy was determined to be as honest

as possible. In the end this was bound to cause problems for him, and the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, his last novel, caused a major scandal in 1895 because of its criticism of marriage and the church – some critics called it 'Jude the Obscene'.

Angry and disillusioned, Hardy stopped writing novels and devoted the rest of his life to writing poetry. He built himself a house in his native Dorset and lived there for the rest of his life. His last great project was an epic poem called *The Dynasts*, a chronicle about the Napoleonic Wars told in verse.

Thomas Hardy was a great reader and thinker, and read everything he could lay his hands on – philosophy, science, the Bible, Greek literature. One of the most profound influences on his thinking was the biologist Charles Darwin, particularly Darwin's emphasis on the role of chance in evolution. Though he had been brought up as a Christian, Hardy struggled with a loss of faith – as did many of his contemporaries.