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Far from the Madding Crowd

Thomas Hardy · *1874 · original English text*

Bathsheba Everdene inherits a farm and will not be tamed. Gabriel Oak, a shepherd who has lost his flock, stays near her in labor and in love. A valentine sent in jest, a soldier's glitter, and a neighbor's long patience turn a pastoral into a story of rash choice, loyalty, and a late, quiet wedding.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it cost Bathsheba to learn that independence is not the same as wisdom, and that the man who will 'keep wanting her' is not the one who can be won by a joke?

"I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die."

Gabriel Oak · Volume I, early, his first proposal under the firs

Oak proposes and is refused because Bathsheba wants someone to tame her, and she thinks he never could. She sends Boldwood a valentine as a jest and wakes a devotion she cannot return. She marries Sergeant Troy, who is vain, already bound to Fanny Robin, and soon gone. Oak remains: he saves the ricks in the storm, buries what must be buried, and will not trade on her ruin. When Boldwood's last hope breaks in violence, Bathsheba, quieter now, takes the man who never stopped working beside her.

KEY CHARACTERS

Bathsheba Everdene
Young, handsome, proud of her independence, who learns by costly mistakes what her farm and her heart require.

Gabriel Oak
Shepherd and sometime farmer: patient, skilled, and faithful long after he has been refused.

William Boldwood
A reserved neighboring farmer, unsealed by a valentine, whose love becomes a monomania.

Sergeant Francis Troy
A soldier of charm and no settled honor, already promised to another when he woos Bathsheba.

Fanny Robin
The poor girl Troy should have married, whose death tells the truth the sword-exercise hid.

the Weatherbury folk
Poorgrass, Coggan, and the rest: a chorus of work, talk, and scripture.

ONE THING CERTAIN

> *"I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die."*
>
> **Gabriel Oak** · Volume I, his first proposal

> *"I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know."*
>
> **Bathsheba Everdene** · Volume I, refusing him

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Farmer Oak, and a Girl on Horseback

VOLUME I, CHAPTERS I–XII

Oak sees Bathsheba, proposes, and loses his sheep in a disaster. She inherits Weatherbury. He comes to work for her after a fire, a shepherd without a farm.

- The first chapters are a character study: Oak's steadiness, her pride and play.
- A pastoral tragedy among the sheep sends him out as a hired man.
- She will be mistress; he will serve, and not only for wages.

02

The Valentine

VOLUME I, CHAPTERS XIII–XXII

On a whim, with a stamp and a rhyme, Bathsheba sends Boldwood a valentine. The grave, lonely farmer is changed, and the joke cannot be called back.

- Sortes Sanctorum and a seal make a child's jest into a man's fate.
- Oak warns her; she is not yet ready to be warned.
- Boldwood's courtship is honorable and already too large.

> *"I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know."*
>
> **Bathsheba Everdene** · Volume I, refusing Oak

03

Sergeant Troy

VOLUME I, CHAPTER XXIII THROUGH VOLUME II, EARLY CHAPTERS

A soldier's sword-exercise in the fern, and a secret marriage, take Bathsheba from both Oak and Boldwood. Fanny Robin, whom Troy had promised to marry, is already in the plot.

- Troy's glitter is a skill and a lie.
- Fanny's missed wedding is a small scene with a long shadow.
- Bathsheba's independence has chosen a master she cannot rule.

04

Storm, Coffin, and the Sea

VOLUME II, THE MIDDLE CHAPTERS

Oak and Bathsheba save the ricks in a thunderstorm while Troy is at the tents. Fanny dies; the coffin is opened. Troy's grief and a later report of drowning leave the farm in a long, unsettled calm.

- The storm is work as loyalty: Oak stays when the master does not.
- The coffin scene is the moral center of Troy's character.
- Boldwood's hope returns, and with it a dangerous patience.

05

A Foggy Night, and a Quiet Wedding

VOLUME II, THROUGH CHAPTER XXVII, 'A FOGGY NIGHT AND MORNING—CONCLUSION'

Troy returns; Boldwood's mind breaks in a shot. After the law has taken its course, Oak prepares to leave the country. Bathsheba, who no longer laughs readily, comes to him at last.

- The ending is not a joke or a flourish but a late, earned companionship.
- Joseph Poorgrass can quote Hosea and still wish them joy.
- Oak has learned to say 'my wife' in what the chorus calls a wonderful natural way.

Steadfast Love · Pride and Independence · A Jest's Cost · Work as Loyalty · Repentance

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is Project Gutenberg #27, the 1874 first edition (Smith, Elder, two volumes, illustrated), not Hardy's extensively revised 1895 text (PG #107). Wording and some scenes differ from later school editions.
2. Volume I runs Chapters I–XXX; Volume II restarts at Chapter I and ends at Chapter XXVII, 'A Foggy Night and Morning—Conclusion.' Cite by volume as well as chapter.
3. Oak's vow italics the words keep wanting you in the source: "I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die."
4. Bathsheba's refusal: "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know."
5. This is a pastoral with a seduction, a death in childbirth, and a shooting. Teach the valentine and the coffin as moral scenes, not as romance only.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #27, Far from the Madding Crowd, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/far-from-the-madding-crowd/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.