Far From the Madding Crowd

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy was born in a small village to a father who was a stonemason and fiddler. After attending school in Dorset, he began to be trained as an architect in London, although he always identified himself with Dorset, a rural, poor area of the country. In the 1850s Hardy developed a friendship with Horace Moule, who encouraged him to read and educate himself and who became a significant intellectual mentor to him. In 1867 Hardy returned to Dorset as an architect, and began to write. *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) marked the beginning of his success (he was able to give up his architecture career), as well as the emergence of the fictional world of Wessex that he would go on to develop in other novels. He also married Emma Lavinia Gifford that year, though they never had children. For the next several decades, Hardy continued to publish novels (most importantly *The Return of the Native* in 1878, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in 1891, and *Jude the Obscure* in 1895) as well as poetry. He became increasingly respected but also invited scandal as a result of his views on sexual conduct and his fatalism. After 1897, Hardy would publish no more novels, but began to work on a long epic poem called *The Dynasts*. Emma, who eventually became estranged from her husband, died in 1912, and in 1914 Hardy married his friend Florence Dugdale. In his later years, Hardy became very influential on other modern poets including W.H. Auden, Robert Frost, and Philip Larkin; he also was visited by William Butler Yeats and Virginia Woolf, among others.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Victorian age, during which Hardy was writing, was also known as the "Age of Transition"—a time in which industrialization and urbanization were causing rapid changes in daily life whose uncertain effects left Victorians unsettled in regards to the future. The stereotypes of Victorians are often that they were buttoned-up, overly prudish, and obsessed with decorum. Indeed, Hardy's sly profanities, including the farm hands' casual reference of the Bible when talking about country love affairs, got him into trouble in Victorian society. But the Victorians were also concerned about maintaining stability and coherence in a world in which the past no longer seemed to provide a model for the future. In some ways, Wessex seems exempt from such changes—but the outside world does enter in, as when Troy wants to become a "modern farmer" with new techniques and methods. While urban modernity is not a part of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the philosophical and psychological questions of modernity—people's place within a new, frightening world—can be teased out from its pages

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As his first successful novel, and the first of the "Wessex novels" that took place in Hardy's fictionalized county, *Far from the Madding Crowd* prefigured other works that returned to this seemingly bucolic, but in fact tumultuous, setting. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, published 17 years later, would also deal with issues of women's independence and vulnerability in such a world. Hardy was also extremely influenced by Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution replaced a confidence in God's plan for humanity with an insistence on contingent and often destructive nature, which took away much of humanity's sense of capacity and meaning.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Far from the Madding Crowd*
- **When Written:** 1874
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1874, first serialized (anonymously) in the *Cornhill Magazine* and then in a volume edition.
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Climax:** Troy bursts in on Boldwood's Christmas party to reclaim his wife for his own, and Boldwood shoots him.
- **Antagonist:** Sergeant Troy is beloved by his wife Bathsheba, and yet he is also the clearest antagonist—not only to her, but also to Fanny, Boldwood, and Gabriel, all of whom he hurts in various ways. One could also argue that Bathsheba is her own worst enemy, as it is her own actions (including marrying Troy) that lead to her unhappiness.
- **Point of View:** Hardy uses an omniscient third-person narrator, who moves throughout the various settings of the novel and even among points of view. The first part of the book hews closely to Gabriel's perspective, for instance, but after he reaches Bathsheba's farm, the text mostly stays close to Bathsheba's own point of view to reveal her thoughts and emotions. The narrator, however, also moves between Bathsheba, Boldwood, Troy, and the "Greek chorus" of the farm hands at Warren's Malt-house. The narrator also at times makes general pronouncements on the characters, women, and rural life as a whole.

EXTRA CREDIT

The Good Old Days Although Hardy's wife died with the couple still estranged, Emma's death led to a prolific output of

poetry as he recalled happier times earlier in their courtship—something that didn't exactly please Hardy's next wife, Florence.

Hidden in verse It's generally accepted that Hardy stopped writing novels and turned to poetry as a result of the controversies around his candid portrayal of sexual relationships and bleak view of human life in his novels. He believed that his ideas could be expounded upon unrestricted in verse.

Far From the Hungry Crowd? As Suzanne Collins, the author of *The Hunger Games* puts it; "Katniss Everdeen owes her last name to Bathsheba Everdene, the lead character in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The two are very different, but both struggle with knowing their hearts."

PLOT SUMMARY

Far From the Madding Crowd opens with a description of farmer Gabriel Oak, a man just out of youth who has established himself as a **sheep**-farmer in the past year, putting all of his savings into the livestock. One day he catches sight of a woman in a carriage and, while she thinks she's alone, he watches her admire herself in her mirror. Later he sees her ride sidesaddle, not exactly ladylike, and when he finally meets the lady—Bathsheba Everdene—in person, he lets slip that he saw her. She's embarrassed and would rather have nothing to do with him, but soon after that he falls asleep in his cottage without leaving a window open to let out smoke from his fire, and Bathsheba saves him just in time. Gabriel begins to fall in love with her, and finally musters up the courage to go to her aunt's house and ask for her hand in marriage. Bathsheba isn't home, and the aunt, Mrs. Hurst, tells Gabriel that her niece has already had a host of suitors. Dejected, Gabriel leaves. But Bathsheba soon arrives and races after Gabriel, who is immediately cheered—but Bathsheba only wanted to say that she can't bear him imagining she has many suitors when she's independent and doesn't want to marry anyone.

Not long after, Gabriel hears that Bathsheba has left for Weatherbury: her uncle has died and she is going to take over as mistress of his farm. Soon after that, Gabriel wakes in the middle of the night to find that one of his over-eager dogs has chased his entire flock of sheep across the fields, and they've fallen over a cliff to their deaths, destroying his entire life's savings. Gabriel settles his debts and is left penniless. He goes off in search of employment as a bailiff or even shepherd, and hears that there's work to be had near Weatherbury. On his way to the job fair, he comes across a fire, and takes charge of the disorganized farmhands trying to put it out: he manages to save it. Impressed, the mistress of the farm rides over and unveils herself: it's Bathsheba. Cool and unflustered, she says she needs a shepherd, and hires Gabriel. He goes to Warren's Malt-house, where a number of the farm hands, including Jan Coggan, Matthew Moon, Henery Fray, Joseph Poorgrass, and Laban Tall often gather to gossip and discuss town affairs. Tonight there's two pieces of news: first, the Bailiff Pennyways has been caught stealing, and second, Fanny Robbin, Bathsheba's youngest servant, is missing.

It's soon discovered that Fanny Robbin ran off with her lover, a soldier in another town. Gabriel had run into the girl on his way into town, and she had looked scared and desperate. He gave her a little money then, and she now sends him the money back with a letter telling him that she's going to be married to Sergeant Francis Troy, but asks him to keep this news quiet. Meanwhile, Fanny goes to see Troy, calling up to his barracks window from the outside and reminding him that he's promised to marry her. He waffles for a little while, but then admits that if he did promise, then they will indeed get married.

Meanwhile, Bathsheba is growing accustomed to her role as female farmer, even though not everyone accepts that, as a woman, she can do it. Nonetheless, she impresses everyone as she participates adeptly at the corn market. Almost all the men's eyes are on her—only one man, the serious middle-aged farmer Mr. Boldwood, fails to pay any attention to her. Bathsheba's pride is slightly bruised at this, even though she doesn't want to be the utter center of attention. Not long afterwards, she's sitting with her servant and companion, Liddy Smallbury, and preparing to send a **valentine** to one of the little boys in the village, Teddy Coggan. Liddy suggests that it would be hilarious to send the valentine to Boldwood instead. On a whim, Bathsheba decides to do so, and seals the anonymous letter with a joke seal that says, "Marry me."

Boldwood is thunderstruck upon receiving the letter. After spending some time in a daze, he decides to go to Warren's Malt-house, where a number of the other workers are drinking and chatting. He leaves with Gabriel, and asks him if he can identify the handwriting. Both upset and shocked at the cavalier thoughtlessness of it, Gabriel says that it's Bathsheba's hand.

At the next market, Boldwood does really study Bathsheba for the first time, and is amazed at her beauty. Bathsheba is satisfied that she's finally gotten his attention, though she has a pang of regret at how she's done so. He resolves to speak with her and asks her to marry him. Now deeply uncomfortable, Bathsheba refuses, but Boldwood insists, saying that he wouldn't dare to ask if he hadn't been led to believe that she had feelings for him. Bathsheba is unable to convince him that it was all a game—finally, she agrees to think about his proposal for a time. Still, she doesn't love him, but she admits to herself that she should accept the moral consequences for her actions. She goes to Gabriel to talk about it, but instead of sympathy she finds that he is disappointed in her actions. Bathsheba grows angry and dismisses him. Soon enough, though, Gabriel's

services are needed when the sheep get into clover and risk being poisoned. He manages to save almost all of them, and Bathsheba turns on her charm once again in order to convince him to stay.

During the sheep-shearing time, Boldwood asks for Bathsheba's hand once again. Knowing she should make amends for her actions, Bathsheba says she will try to love him, but would like him to wait a few more weeks before she promises. Thrilled, he agrees. That night, though, Bathsheba is pacing the grounds when she literally runs into a man on a path—a piece of fabric on her dress gets stuck to one of his soldier's buttons. The man begins to tease her about her beauty and charm, and Bathsheba isn't sure whether she should be pleased or angry. Upon arriving home, she asks Liddy who the soldier might be. She thinks it's Sergeant Troy, who's known to be a trickster with women, but whom she also finds charming and handsome. A week later he introduces himself to her formally, continuing to tease and jest with her. He eventually convinces Bathsheba to meet him in a clearing later that night; she does so, and he kisses her.

Bathsheba falls in love with Troy, something that Gabriel notices, though it pains him. He decides to speak with Bathsheba about it, reminding her that she owes something to Boldwood (who has been traveling). Bathsheba grows angry with Gabriel and orders him to leave again, which he refuses. With Liddy, meanwhile, Bathsheba moves wildly from one temper to the next, worrying about Troy's character but unable to stamp out her feelings for him. She sends a letter to Boldwood telling him she can't marry him, but she happens to meet him in person the day after and he goes into a rage against Troy, who has just left town for a few days. Worried that they'll quarrel or hurt each other, Bathsheba decides she can either try to prevent Troy from coming back for a while or else break things off with him. Late at night, she takes her horse, Dainty, and rides off. But Gabriel and Jan Coggan think that the horse has been stolen, so they follow its tracks until they meet Bathsheba at the tollbooth. They resolve not to say anything of it.

Bathsheba is gone for a few weeks, and Gabriel's helper, Cainy Ball, brings news to the farm hands that he saw her arm in arm with Sergeant Troy in Bath. Gabriel is upset and troubled, but that night he hears Bathsheba's voice, and thinks that since she's come home all must be well. Boldwood, though, catches sight of Troy outside an inn in town, and decides to follow him. At first, he says he'll pay Troy to marry Fanny, as is his duty, and Troy agrees; but Bathsheba soon comes to see him, and Boldwood, hiding in the bushes, recognizes just how much she loves him. Deeply upset, he tells Troy to marry Bathsheba so as to save her honor—he'll pay him for that instead. They go to Bathsheba's farm together, and Troy slips him a newspaper announcing that he and Bathsheba already got married. Troy laughs in Boldwood's face.

Bathsheba soon grows upset with Troy's laziness, penchant for drinking, and love of gambling and horse racing. On the night of the harvest dinner, he ignores Gabriel's warnings that a storm is coming and the ricks should be battened down to protect the produce. Instead, he plies the workers with brandy until they're in a drunken stupor: only Gabriel, and later Bathsheba, work all night to protect the farm.

Soon afterward, Troy and Bathsheba are leaving the Casterbridge market when they see a poor, ragged woman walking along the road. Troy tells Bathsheba to go ahead: he's recognized Fanny, and they agree to meet a few days afterward so that Troy can help her and find her a place to stay. At home, Bathsheba discovers a lock of blond hair in Troy's **watch**-case: he admits it belonged to the girl he loved before her.

Only a few days later, the news reaches town that Fanny is dead—she had walked all the way to the Casterbridge Union-house and had died soon after arriving. Bathsheba is troubled by this news, wondering if there's any connection to Troy. She has Fanny's casket brought to her own house, since Fanny was her uncle's servant. Mary-ann tells Bathsheba of a rumor that there are two people in the casket, not one—indeed, Gabriel had seen "Fanny and child" written on the coffin and had rubbed out "and child." That night, Bathsheba dares to open the coffin and she sees the two, as well as Fanny's golden hair. Later Troy arrives and sees Fanny's body: he kisses it, and tells Bathsheba that he only ever loved Fanny, and that Bathsheba is nothing to him. He storms off. First he spends all his money getting a gravestone engraved and plants flowers around it, though the rain wipes them away. He then decides he cannot return home. He leaves and, near Budmouth, decides to go for a swim. Troy is drawn out by the current and finally is picked up by a boat. His clothes are not where he left them, so he accepts the sailors' proposal to join them on a voyage to America for six months.

Back at Weatherbury, Bathsheba has reached a dull apathy: at first she refuses to believe that Troy is dead, as is reported, but as time passes her doubts cease. Boldwood proposes that she agree to marry him seven years from Troy's disappearance, since she will not legally be a widow until then. Bathsheba again puts him off, torn about what to do since she knows she owes him a great deal. At the late-summer fair, Troy returns as an employee of the circus. He catches sight of Bathsheba in the audience, but manages to avoid her. He gets Bailiff Pennyways to join his side, and together they scheme on how best for Troy to reclaim his "property," in his wife and her farm.

That Christmas, Boldwood prepares a grand party—quite out of keeping with his personality. As it approaches, Bathsheba grows increasingly anxious. Finally, at the party, Boldwood once again proposes to her, and finally she agrees to marry him at the aforementioned date. Even though she's clearly distraught, Boldwood seems satisfied that he's gotten an answer from her, and forces her to wear a ring he's bought for her. As they

emerge, though, the doorman calls that a stranger is outside, and Troy walks in. He orders Bathsheba to leave with him. Bathsheba freezes, but then Boldwood tells her to go with her husband. As Troy seizes her arm, though, she screams, and suddenly Boldwood shoots Troy dead. He calmly walks outside and turns himself in to the Casterbridge jail.

Gabriel goes to fetch the doctor, and when they return Bathsheba is sitting regally, her full composure regained, with Troy's head in her lap. But when they return to her home, she begins to wail about her guilt for everything that has happened. Boldwood is initially sentenced to death, but thanks to a petition, is given a life sentence.

Gabriel tells Bathsheba that he's planning to leave the farm and perhaps even the country. She grows increasingly upset at what seems to be a greater coolness from him and disregard for her. Finally she goes to see him at his cottage, where he tells her that he's agreed to take on Boldwood's farm. Bathsheba admits that she's been waiting for him to ask her to marry him once more: Gabriel is surprised but thrilled. Although he'd like a larger affair, Bathsheba insists on a small, simple wedding. They get married with only a few witnesses, but that evening many of the farmhands come to wish them well, bringing instruments and singing songs at their porch.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bathsheba Everdene – Bathsheba, the orphaned daughter of townspeople, is raised by her aunt in the countryside. From a young age, she is used to managing things on her own: for example, her aunt has her take charge of milking cows and fetching supplies for the house. She is handsome and can be vain about her appearance. In many ways, even though Bathsheba is already independent and determined at the beginning of the novel, she matures over the course of the book. At first, she insists on her independence to the detriment of others' feelings, as when she pursues Gabriel Oak without the intention of marrying him. Through the careless game that she later plays with Mr. Boldwood, she comes to recognize that independence is not necessarily the greatest good, and that it can be important to rely on others, just as it is crucial to understand the implications of one's own actions on others. In some ways Bathsheba conforms to Victorian stereotypes about women; for example, she can be thoughtless and emotional. But she also defies such stereotypes by running the farm herself and learning to manage her emotions and face an often hostile, gossipy world outside.

Gabriel Oak – Gabriel, like Bathsheba, changes over the course of the novel as a result of tragedy. For him the tragedy happens rather early on when his dog runs his **sheep**—which represent his life's savings and investment—over a cliff, and he is left penniless. At the beginning of the book, he is a more or less average person. He is no longer a young man but not yet fully adult, and he has a generally good reputation. He can be quick to judge, as when he labels Bathsheba vain, and he can be thoughtless, as when he says out loud to her that he really should marry someone wealthier than she is. But as a result of Bathsheba's refusal to marry him, as well as his misfortune, he becomes stoic, brave, and loyal. Over and over again, he proves what a decent human being he is: he puts out the fire, saves the lambs, and protects the ricks while Troy plies the other workers with brandy. He sees his love for Bathsheba as a burden he must bear, and he simultaneously tries to do all he can for her while feeling the need to rebuke her when he thinks she's not living up to his high standards. Gabriel also recognizes the carefully delineated social distinctions of the Weatherbury community, and knows enough not to try to claim a higher place in it than is his due—a strategy that ultimately proves successful.

Mr. Boldwood – The second of Bathsheba's suitors, Mr. Boldwood is a respectable, handsome, but serious forty-ish farmer, who is in charge of Lower Farm, not far from Bathsheba's farm in Waterbury. He has never married and, despite the gossip of the villagers, has never really been in love. He was, though, responsible for Fanny Robbin for a time, undertaking responsibility for her schooling and then her place at Bathsheba's uncle's farm. Boldwood's crucial turning point in the novel is the **valentine** that Bathsheba sends off to him, provoking a years-long adoration and obsession—one that slowly disintegrates into madness. The valentine opens Boldwood's eyes to the world of women, and disrupts his decades-long habit of stability and solemnity. As the book goes on, Boldwood's love for Bathsheba takes on disturbing features, as he tries to extract promises from Bathsheba even when it causes her distress. Boldwood's increasingly serious mental disturbance, though, is paired with a sincere love for Bathsheba, one that finally gives her freedom even at the expense of his own.

Sergeant Francis Troy – Bathsheba's third suitor is the son of a doctor who was ruined by debt after moving from town to country. Troy is impulsive—he leaves his clerk job to enlist in the army—and is often described as a child who follows his instincts and can't think of other people's thoughts or desires over his own. He is handsome and charming, able to use his looks and language to his advantage in order to get what he wants (especially with women, though also when money is involved, as when he tricks Boldwood into paying him off for the marriage to Bathsheba that has already happened). But Troy is portrayed as truly capable of love. He may have seduced and then abandoned Fanny, but it becomes clear over the course of the novel (both to readers and, perhaps, to Troy himself) that he did love her—though such love is inextricable from his cruelty to Bathsheba. Ultimately, however, Troy's desire for material

comfort conquers his aversion to Bathsheba and prompts him to return to her, though he can't imagine just how much of an effect his actions will have on others. In this way, he is not dissimilar from the Bathsheba of the beginning of the novel.

Fanny Robbin – The youngest servant at Bathsheba's farm, Fanny has no friends or family to her name, though she was taken under Boldwood's wing in order to be established at the farm. Fanny is in love with Troy, who has courted her and promised to marry her, though he waffles on that promise. Fanny runs away to marry Troy – a marriage that never happens – and slowly sinks into greater and greater desperation, especially once she becomes pregnant with Troy's child. Fanny is in many ways a foil to Bathsheba, who can't manage to decide whether to pity or hate her rival. Her death condemns Bathsheba's marriage with Troy to failure, since it underlines to Troy how much he actually did love Fanny.

Jan Coggan – A farm hand who is friendly and cheerful, often serving as best man or godfather in marriages and baptisms around Weatherbury. Coggan is one of the regulars at Warren's Malt-house and often is wont to veer off into tangents during a conversation. He represents general public opinion around the town.

Joseph Poorgrass – Another of Bathsheba's farm-hands, Poorgrass is shy and timid, though he feels at home among the other workers, especially at Warren's Malt-house. Poorgrass is wont to make humorous, often irrelevant biblical and historical allusions, but he's also superstitious—he mixes these influences without any rhyme or reason. He is earnest and a good worker, although also sometimes drinks too much when he's tempted.

Henry (Henery) Fray – Another farm-hand, slightly over middle age, who insists on spelling his name "Henery." He is another one of the regulars at Warren's Malt-house, and is more critical than the others: he rages about Bailiff Pennyways, for instance, and is among the more skeptical about Bathsheba's capacity as a woman farmer.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Hurst – Mrs. Hurst is Bathsheba's aunt and caretaker who allows her niece to mostly manage the household. She is a bit cantankerous and scheming—she suggests to Gabriel that Bathsheba has a number of young suitors, for instance—before falling out of the story when Bathsheba leaves for Weatherbury.

Mrs. Coggan – Presumably Jan Coggan's wife, Mrs. Coggan is one of Bathsheba's housekeepers at the farm.

Teddy Coggan – Presumably one of Jan and Mrs. Coggan's children—we are told that there are many Coggan children in town—Teddy is initially the reason for Bathsheba to send a **valentine.**

Liddy Smallbury— Billy Smallbury's youngest daughter, and Bathsheba's servant and companion. Liddy helps Bathsheba navigate the social world of Weatherbury, and it's often unclear whether she is more of a friend or a servant.

Laban Tall – Another farm hand and a young married man who is more often known as "Susan Tall's husband," given that she tends to direct his affairs; he becomes clerk of the parish by the end of the novel.

Susan Tall – Laban Tall's wife and a bossy, determined woman who is also one of the town's great gossips.

Matthew Moon – Another farm hand and just as superstitious as Joseph Poorgrass.

Mark Clark – Another farm hand.

Bailiff Pennyways – Initially the bailiff of Bathsheba's farm, Pennyways is fired when he's caught stealing barley. He is conniving and finds a natural ally in Troy when the latter schemes on how best to return home.

Mary-ann Money – Bathsheba's char-woman and one of the indoor workers on the farm; a good-humored and pleasant woman.

Andrew Candle – The newest farm hand on Bathsheba's estate.

The maltster – The very old owner of Warren's Malt-house—he cannot or will not say his exact age—and the patriarch of the Smallbury family. He knew Bathsheba's parents and is, in general, a useful source of knowledge about the area, even though he never leaves the malt-house.

Jacob Smallbury – One of the maltster's sons and another farm hand.

William (Billy) Smallbury – Another farm hand, also the son of the maltster.

Cain (Cainy) Ball – A young boy who is Gabriel's shepherd's hand, Cain was named by his mother, who got the Abel and Cain Bible story mixed up and named her son for the murderer, not the victim.

Temperance and Soberness Miller – Two women and employees at Bathsheba's farm, responsible for preparing sheep's fleeces after they're sheared.

Sam Samway – The manager of Boldwood's farm.

Mr. Granthead – A doctor and surgeon.

Mr. Thirdly – The parish parson.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

EPIC ALLUSION, TRAGEDY, AND ILLUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy began to construct a fictional region of England, "Wessex," which he calls in the preface a "partly real, partly dream-country" and which he went on to further develop in a number of other novels. In some ways, Hardy describes this world and its inhabitants with all the world-historical importance of places found in famous epics, such as Homer's Ithaca or Troy. And yet, at the same time, Hardy deploys an ironic touch that works to deflate his mythical or Biblical allusions. Thus, even as he treats his fictional English locale as a place of eminent significance, Hardy also reminds his readers of the much more pedestrian concerns of modern rural life.

The book is full of allusions to the Bible, as well as to ancient Greek and Roman stories. For instance, Hardy describes his character Bathsheba, after she kisses Troy, as experiencing a kind of shock similar to Moses' amazement after God gives him a command. Hardy describes Gabriel Oak, meanwhile, as comparable to Minerva, referring to the Roman goddess of wisdom. These allusions rely on the Victorian reader's familiarity with the Bible and epic literature, and they work to insist on the significance of the actions within the book by making the actions of rural England seem comparable to the consequential actions of myths. Even if *Far From the Madding Crowd* takes place in a "partly dream-country," one that's far from the metropolitan center of society, we are asked to take its concerns and those of its characters seriously.

Nonetheless, even as Hardy insists that the tragic events in the book should be taken seriously, his ironic touches constantly threaten to undercut the grandiosity of his Biblical and classical allusions. One example is the mother of Cainy Ball, who mixed up the Genesis story about Cain and Abel and named her son for the murderer rather than the victim. Again, readers would have been expected to laugh knowingly while the characters of Weatherbury are subject to ironic teasing. Similarly, in some ways the group of villagers, like Joseph Poorgrass and Jan Coggan, who gather periodically for a pint at Warren's Malt-house, function like an ancient Greek chorus by reflecting on the affairs of others and providing a running commentary on the events of the village. Their country patois and joking demeanor, however, make such a characterization humorously inapt. Irony, then, serves as an extra layer of complexity in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, prodding the reader to both recognize the grand allusions to canonical texts and to smile at their deflation in a modern rural world where illusions of grandeur can be woefully misplaced.

CONFLICT AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

The title of *Far From the Madding Crowd* is taken from an 18th-century poem by Thomas Gray, "Elegy on a Country Churchyard," but it cuts off the rest of the line, which in its entirety reads, "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." While the idea of the bucolic countryside as being free of the "strife" of the crowd is one way to characterize country life, Hardy's title is ironic: rather than depicting stereotypes of pastoral calm, his novel uses those images as a jumping-off point to portray a landscape that's actually riddled with conflict. Its characters must battle against the dangerous and often overpowering laws of nature and its creatures, even while the characters themselves become subject to conflicts among each other that mirror the difficulties of the natural world.

Indeed, nature seems often to fly in the face of people's desires and plans. The disaster of Gabriel Oak's **sheep** is the novel's first dramatic instance of this. While Gabriel has spent years and all his resources developing the flock, one unlucky event kills them all and immediately transforms his circumstances. Later, though, Gabriel seems better equipped to handle the vicissitudes of natural disaster. He meets Bathsheba again after putting out a fire in Weatherbury, and he saves a group of lambs from being poisoned by clover—two instances of Gabriel's newfound ability to navigate the danger of the natural world. Troy is the opposite case: he is used to managing his own affairs adeptly, but after Fanny's death—and after a storm washes away the flowers he's planted at her grave—he rages against cold natural laws and uncontrollable circumstances rather than learning to work within them.

Bathsheba, meanwhile, also learns to navigate as best she can in a hostile natural environment: for her, Troy eventually becomes yet another conflict-ridden aspect of this environment. After their wedding, for instance, he plies Bathsheba's workers with alcohol. As a result, no one except Gabriel is around to keep the hay safe from an incoming storm, and Gabriel and Bathsheba have to race against time and nature to ensure that all is not lost. Humans, then, can work to mitigate conflicts within nature, can rebel—unsuccessfully—against it, or can become hostile forces of their own. Whichever the case, the novel makes clear that country life is not exempt from such conflicts. And while humans manage natural forces as best they can, there is little they can do to halt forces outside their control. Fate, chance, and circumstance, then, rule Hardy's rural world.

WOMEN IN A MAN'S WORLD

Just as Bathsheba has to struggle against unfriendly natural forces, she also has to navigate a world that is made largely by and for men. This is particularly true once she takes over her uncle's farm as its mistress and owner. The attitudes of the novel's characters towards their new female supervisor range from admiring to condescending, and even the novel itself can indulge in stereotyped analysis of specifically "womanly" attributes. What

is unmistakable, however, is that it is quite rare in the novel's world for a woman to be a farmer—or to be in a position of authority at all. From the beginning of *Far From The Madding Crowd*, nonetheless, we are given to expect that Bathsheba is not like other women. She is headstrong and confident; while many women would happily accept a marriage proposal from someone like Gabriel Oak, she refuses almost unthinkingly.

Oak and Boldwood, perhaps because they fall in love with Bathsheba, don't seem to mind her position of female authority (although Oak does think that Bathsheba wouldn't be able to run the farm without him). Others, though, feel differently. At the markets, for instance, people look askance at Bathsheba weighing seed and chatting with clients just "like a man" with mingled respect, suspicion, and scorn. Meanwhile, the "Greek chorus" of farm hands continually discusses her every move. As a woman Bathsheba is subject to increased scrutiny and judgment and is held to a far higher standard than men—a scrutiny that holds for the other women in the novel, like Fanny Robbin, while the actions of someone like Troy are simply laughed off. Bathsheba recognizes and fears this level of judgment: it's one of the reasons that she relies so much on her servant Liddy, whom she thinks of as a fellow woman she can trust.

Despite Hardy's radical attempt to portray Bathsheba as a confident and capable woman, the novel often slips into characterizations of her stereotypically female weaknesses. Such judgments might strike a contemporary reader as frustratingly old-fashioned. Ultimately, though, Bathsheba does prove herself able to manage a farm on her own. This portrayal of a successful female business owner is a challenge to Victorian assumptions about the role of women in public life.

PRIDE AND PENANCE

One of Bathsheba's principal weaknesses is her sense of pride, which (at least initially) is linked to vanity. When Gabriel Oak catches her looking at herself in the mirror, Bathsheba is simultaneously embarrassed and comforted by knowing that he's seen her at her worst. Bathsheba's pride suffers a number of other setbacks over the course of the novel, setbacks which she ultimately recognizes and accepts as proper ways of atoning for her earlier mistakes.

Bathsheba's pride can also be linked to her thoughtlessness regarding other people: confident and impetuous, she dashes off a **valentine** to Boldwood without pausing to think of the possible ramifications of her actions. In another way, Bathsheba's pride leads her down a difficult path and into dire consequences for herself. Carried away by Troy's charm and flattery, she seems to decide to marry him for the sole purpose of rehabilitating her pride after he compares her to another, more beautiful woman.

Pride is not, of course, limited to Bathsheba. Gabriel Oak, too, is proud and stubborn. After being refused marriage by Bathsheba, he only reluctantly begins to work for her, and keeps his feelings about her to himself for almost the entire rest of the novel. But for men, pride is usually an admirable quality, a sign of maturity, dignity, and self-discipline; for a woman, meanwhile, pride is more often portrayed as a vice.

After Troy's apparent death, Bathsheba does decide that she must pay for her headstrong decisions of the past. Part of her penance involves her relationship to Boldwood, even as she struggles to determine whether agreeing to marry him would, in fact, be a properly moral show of penance. In general, the tragedies and deaths in the novel suggest that weakness and mistakes do ultimately lead to some kind of retribution—even if the novel shies away from implying that there's a divine accounting that balances out good and evil in the end. The book also implies that penance may not have to be eternal. There is not exactly a fairy-tale ending to the novel—the final chapter includes a tiny, quiet wedding that takes place amid eerie fog—but Oak and Bathsheba are finally permitted to be together, implying that mistakes can be corrected and pride accounted for.

CLASS STATUS AND MOBILITY

Part of Bathsheba's struggle in deciding whom to marry and how to establish herself stems from her uncertain socioeconomic status throughout the novel. At the beginning, Bathsheba and her aunt don't have much money, and yet Bathsheba is clearly not a peasant—she is well-educated and seems to occupy a position much above her actual income. Oak, meanwhile, seems to be on his way to reaching the rural middle class before the disaster of his sheep flock sends him back to fragility and insecurity and forces him to become a farmer's hand rather than a small landowner. His language, nonetheless, distinguishes him from the other farm hands, whose country slang places them onto a low social and economic rung from which they presumably may never ascend. Thus, the characters of Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak suggest that, while class defines opportunity and perception in rural England, it is not impossible for people—particularly smart, ambitious, and educated ones—to transcend it.

Part of Bathsheba's attraction to Troy, meanwhile, is the glamor of his position as soldier: while he doesn't make a high income, he seems in many ways to be outside the closely-watched and finely-differentiated layers of rural economic positioning. Troy's situation suggests the desirability of being liberated from the petty and consuming class posturing that vexes the characters (like Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak) who are more enmeshed in the social fabric. Troy's literal mobility, however, also allows him to hide his sins, including impregnating Fanny Robbins. Thus, the social fabric can be both oppressive and protective—had Troy been more firmly rooted in society, Fanny and Bathsheba might have known, through his reputation, to stay away from

him. Fanny, in turn, is perhaps the most vulnerable character in the novel: her lack of class power ultimately condemns her to death. In some ways, Bathsheba's own class privilege makes her exempt from such a fate as Fanny's, but the pairing of these two women underlines how powerful the intersection of class and gender can be in the novel. While Fanny is doubly condemned as a lower-class woman, Bathsheba too suffers from being taken advantage of—by Troy, for instance—as a result of her own wealth, coupled with sexual manipulation. Class, then, is shown to be a complex and powerful social category that is unevenly restrictive and has the potential to condemn people in some circumstances and save them in others. Class, in other words, is a social force, with all the complexities and contradictions that characterize human society.

The negotiation of power and privilege is at the center of *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and the trajectories of the characters suggest a social landscape marked by class divisions that are deep and defining but, nevertheless, malleable. However, Hardy's characterization of the central characters complicates the novel's apparent optimism about class transcendence. When it was published, *Far From the Madding Crowd* was criticized for its portrayal of rural people as being "above" their actual class, and this rings somewhat true in light of the fact that Gabriel and Bathsheba seem to have resources (like education) and characteristics (like middle class speech patterns and a sense of agency and confidence) that would not typically be available to the rural poor. There's a sense, then, that Hardy believes in class transcendence for those characters who seem to naturally fit more with the middle class than the poor class in to which they were born. Conversely, class mobility seems unavailable to those characters, like the farmhands, whose characteristics seem to make them stereotypically poor. Likely unintentionally, then, Hardy gives readers the sense that class distinctions are not arbitrary cultural categories that shape and limit those who are born into them, but rather categories that reflect natural distinctions between people's individual natures. The way Hardy writes about them, it seems that Gabriel and Bathsheba are able to enjoy social mobility not because they are defying an arbitrary category, but because they are shown to naturally belong to a category other than the one into which they were born. This essentialism about class (or the idea that our class identification comes from nature rather than nurture) may seem backwards to a modern reader, and, since *Far From the Madding Crowd* is, in many ways, a novel defiant about class, this idea may have seemed backwards to Hardy, too. The stubborn persistence of class essentialism in a novel that attempts to be optimistic about class mobility is therefore a fault line in the novel, and one that shows just how powerful the idea of class was in Victorian England. In a sense, then, class distinctions are shown to be vexed not simply in the world of the novel, but also in the author's own mind.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LAMBS AND SHEEP

Sheep are central to the livelihood of almost everyone in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Many characters are directly responsible for taking care of sheep, and other characters, like Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak, have significant financial investments in sheep, but these animals are not static elements of a bucolic country landscape. Instead, they symbolize the fraught dangers of life in the country, and the ways in which a single fateful event can irrevocably change someone's life and livelihood. By themselves, sheep do not possess the same kind of determination and motivation as humans. Instead they can be easily led astray—by the dog who forces them over a cliff to their deaths, or out of their field into a neighboring field of clover, which poisons them. These animals thus also represent the interdependence necessary to social life, as the characters cannot simply let the sheep be, but must watch over them and take care of them, putting the flock's safety before their own. At one point, the women at Boldwood's party are even compared to sheep huddled together during an impending storm. Animal instinct, then, is something shared by both humans and sheep— both species must understand (however vaguely) that certain forces, like Mother Nature, have power over them.

THE VALENTINE

As a new, confident mistress of a farm, Bathsheba suddenly has the position and the freedom to write to others and be listened to, as well to complete a variety of business and personal transactions. Although she's gained such power, she does not fully recognize the responsibility that comes with it. The valentine that Bathsheba dashes off to Boldwood, with its seal saying "Marry me," thus represents Bathsheba's tragic flaw for which she will have to atone. The valentine is meant to be playful and frivolous, hardly a true declaration of her feelings for Boldwood. In fact, Bathsheba only sends it because her pride is hurt that Boldwood won't pay any attention to her, even though she hates to be ogled and gossiped about by the other villagers. She sends it off with little regard for the consequences it might have. Like other elements in the novel—the biblical or Greek mythological allusions, for instance—the valentine straddles comedy and tragedy, frivolity and great seriousness. It also is at the center of Bathsheba's own transformation over the course of the book, as she recognizes that her actions do, in fact, have consequences, and that part of her position of authority requires acknowledging her responsibilities to others.

WATCHES

Two of Bathsheba's suitors, Gabriel Oak and Sergeant Troy, both have watches that they consult regularly and that seem, in many ways, an extension of their characters. This is a surprising similarity between two otherwise quite different figures. These watches are, of course, simply humdrum accessories that are far from uncommon, but in the novel they also serve as material objects, markers of status and position, that underline each character's personality and relationship to the world. Gabriel's watch is, like him—at least at the beginning of the novel—imperfect and even rather mediocre. It doesn't always work, which often requires him to shake it or otherwise fiddle with it; sometimes he even has to use it in tandem with looking at the stars and constellations in order to know what time it is. But Gabriel's watch reminds us of his pragmatism and willingness to work through difficulty in order to make things work himself. He does have a more successful relationship to the natural world, dealing with circumstances beyond his control not by rebelling against his fate but by working within the obstacles with which he is presented.

Gabriel's pragmatic, reasonable attitude contrasts with Troy's impulsive, childish behavior. Troy's watch is elegant and expensive. It belonged to his father and it is important to him, but he thrusts it into Bathsheba's hands when he's courting her, before admitting that he hadn't thought the gift through at all. It's also through his mindless opening and closing of his watch that Bathsheba learns of Troy's love for Fanny—an earnest love, certainly, but also one that gives his thoughtlessness a particularly cruel bent. As material possessions with their own quirks and attributes, then, watches in the novel also say something about their owners.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Far From the Madding Crowd* published in 2003.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ She did not adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do any one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in a feminine direction—her expression seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas in which men would play a part—vistas of probable triumphs—the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts were imagined as lost and won.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene, Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel's first image of Bathsheba is of a woman who clearly cares about her appearance and is eager to admire herself. Here, Gabriel notes that there's no reason for her to look into the mirror—nothing to adjust—other than her vanity and pride. It's not exactly a positive first impression. Nonetheless, Gabriel's observation also sets up a number of the motivating forces of the novel. It foreshadows some of the book's major conflicts, conflicts in which, indeed, "men would play a part." While Bathsheba is described as majestic in her awareness of her own power over men, however, there's no sense that she understands just what the consequences of such power may be.

As the narrator will state later on, Bathsheba knows little about how love functions beyond the surface—indeed, this ignorance will in many ways lead to her own suffering. Gabriel's powers of observation are acute enough to allow him to study Bathsheba and foresee some of what awaits her in the future, even if he cannot, of course, foretell precisely what will unfold.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The image as a whole was that of a small Noah's Ark on a small Ararat, allowing the traditionary outlines and general form of the Ark which are followed by toy makers, and by these means are established in men's imagination among the finest because the earliest impressions, to pass as an approximate pattern.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

Here the narrator describes the small hut belonging to Gabriel Oak, who has established himself in Norcombe in order to become a self-sufficient sheep farmer. Part of the purpose of the comparison to Noah's Ark is to emphasize just how isolated Gabriel's position in the countryside is: he is alone with his dogs and sheep (which is why, perhaps, Bathsheba's presence is so intriguing to him). But the book also often includes references to biblical and mythological

affairs in describing characters as well as the natural setting. Ararat is a mountain in what today is eastern Turkey, where Noah's Ark was said to have come to rest after the flood that takes place in the Book of Genesis. To compare Gabriel's hut to this ark is thus to emphasize the nobility and dignity in his work, and the pride he takes in it, despite his lowly social status.

At the same time, it's perhaps best to not always take such comparisons altogether seriously—the idea of the shabby shelter as a world-historical ark is also meant to provoke a smile given the gulf between the two contexts. That the description subsequently includes a comparison to the arks that are fashioned by toymakers underlines the irony, as well as signaling the approximate and even vague nature of the comparison—it wouldn't necessarily keep up under scrutiny.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ "What I meant to tell you was only this," she said eagerly, and yet half-conscious of the absurdity of the position she had made for herself: "that nobody has got me yet as a sweetheart, instead of my having a dozen as my aunt said; I *hate* to be thought men's property in that way—though possibly I shall be to be had some day."

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene (speaker), Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

After Bathsheba's aunt tells Gabriel that her niece has had plenty of suitors, and he goes away dejectedly, Bathsheba runs after Gabriel. He's encouraged by her apparent eagerness, but soon it becomes clear that she hasn't hurried after him in order to accept his proposal. Indeed, Bathsheba herself begins to realize that her purpose perhaps hasn't merited such eagerness. Nonetheless, she wants to make clear to Gabriel that she won't stand being considered as the property of a man, not to mention a girl to be handed around between a number of different suitors.

It's not clear why exactly Bathsheba feels the need to share this conviction with Gabriel, especially as she admits that while she is free and independent now, she may not always be—a pragmatic acknowledgement of the historical reality in Victorian England, in which women *were* subject to their husband's authority far more than in recent times. But for now, it does seem both that Bathsheba wants to maintain her independence, and that she wants Gabriel to understand her desire for such independence. He's seen her at her most proud and vain, and she hopes that he can come to recognize the more positive sides of such character traits as well.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ The sheep were not insured. –All the savings of a frugal life had been dispersed at a blow: his hopes of being an independent farmer were laid low—possibly for ever. Gabriel's energies patience and industry had been so severely taxed, during the years of his life between eighteen and eight and twenty, to reach his present stage of progress that no more seemed to be left in him.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel has followed, in dread, the son of his more mature dog George to a cliff, off of which the dog has driven his entire flock of sheep. The book acknowledges that, in some ways, the dog was merely taking what he had been taught to its logical conclusion: he has been trained to lead the sheep from one place to another, to herd them until they no longer move, and he's done so. Gabriel understands that there is no one to blame, exactly, for the tragedy—that nature has its own laws, which can be entirely indifferent to what humans what. At the same time, this is a scene that doesn't diminish the tragedy of the situation through tongue-in-cheek irony. Gabriel deals with what has happened with dignity, but also despair—he's spent his entire adulthood trying to create a better life for himself, and now all those hopes have been dashed. The event thus also makes clear just how fragile life in the country can be, given the vagaries of nature and the difficulty of foreseeing contingent circumstances.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Among these heavy yeomen a feminine figure glided—the single one of her sex that the room contained. She moved between them as a chaise between carts, was heard after them as a romance after sermons, and was felt among them like a breeze among furnaces. It had required a little determination—far more than she had at first imagined—to take up a position here, for at her first entry the lumbering dialogues had ceased, nearly every face had been turned towards her, and those that were already turned rigidly fixed there.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

For the first time, Bathsheba attends the corn market at Casterbridge: she's the only woman among the many farmers that have come to buy and sell their goods. While Bathsheba seems entirely comfortable and at ease here, such apparent confidence belies her uncertainty. She's acutely aware of how much everyone is ogling her: the extra level of scrutiny that women always have to face in her society is exacerbated by the fact that she's occupying a role that's quite rare for women, being the owner of a farm herself. At the same time, part of Bathsheba does appreciate the fact that all eyes on her. Rather than cowing in the face of attention, she is inspired by it to act the part of a woman in authority until she becomes it. Bathsheba is described as a kind of breath of fresh air for the other men—a "breeze among furnaces"—that shakes up the monotony of daily life and suggests changes to come.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ So very idly and unreflectingly was this deed done. Of love, as a spectacle Bathsheba had a fair knowledge; but of love subjectively she knew nothing.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Bathsheba and Liddy have been teasing each other about the idea of sending a valentine to Boldwood instead of to little Teddy Coggan, as Bathsheba had first intended. They decide on it almost thoughtlessly, though Liddy in particular seems to derive a certain amount of glee from the idea of the serious, grave Boldwood receiving such a note. Bathsheba, in turn, adds a further element of intrigue by placing, at the last moment, a joke seal saying "Marry me" on the envelope.

As the chapter ends, the narrator foreshadows some of the major conflicts to come, suggesting that as "unreflectingly" as Bathsheba acted, she will have more than occasion to reflect on it in the future. So much of this novel, indeed, deals with the unpredictable and in many ways unstoppable consequences of seemingly unimportant, circumstantial events. But in this case, disaster is invited by cause and effect directly linked to a careless action that was rooted in a flaw in Bathsheba's character. She is vain, flirtatious, and proud, and, as the narrator notes, her apparent confidence masks a greater immaturity. Bathsheba thinks of love as a natural extension of the admiring gazes of the men at the market, for instance: a "spectacle" that may make her the center of attention, may even cause her some discomfort, but one in which the stakes are relatively low. The rest of the novel will depict her increasing knowledge and maturity regarding the "subjective" elements of love and its relationship to pride.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "Our mis'ess will bring us all to the bad," said Henery. "Ye may depend on that—with her new farming ways. And her ignorance is terrible to hear. Why only yesterday she cut a rasher of bacon the longways of the flitch!"
"Ho-ho-ho!" said the assembly, the maltster's feeble note being heard amid the rest as that of a different instrument: "heu-heu-heu!"

Related Characters: Henry (Henery) Fray (speaker), Bathsheba Everdene, The maltster

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

As is often the case, the farm hands gather at Warren's Malt-house in order to discuss the local gossip and affairs of the village. Here they're talking about their new mistress, Bathsheba, who has recently taken over from her uncle. While a number of the farm hands already respect and

admire her, Henery Fray is far more skeptical—and indeed, his proclamations come to sway the others, at least temporarily. Henery's criticisms take shape in two ways. First, he suggests that Bathsheba is going to meddle with how things have always been done, by introducing her "new farming ways." Weatherbury, unlike a city like Bath or London, is described in the novel as largely unchanging through the years, even if it is beginning to be affected by industrialization. As a newcomer, even if she doesn't do anything to suggest the idea of total transformation, Bathsheba is naturally looked upon with suspicion by those who see any change as too much.

Secondly, Henery criticizes Bathsheba's "ignorance" regarding farming in general. His example proves wildly funny to the others, including the maltster, although the reference to her misuse of a rasher is so specific that this shared humor may well be absent for the non-specialist reader. Indeed, the arcane nature of the charge is meant, in itself, to provoke a comic response and to undermine the credibility of the men's criticism. At the same time, Henery is skeptical of the very possibility of a woman being a mistress of a farmer: he resents Bathsheba's authority over him and the others, and some of his criticisms undoubtedly stem from that prejudice.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ Boldwood's blindness to the difference between approving of what circumstance suggests, and originating what it does not, was well matched by Bathsheba's insensibility to the possible great issues of little beginnings.

Related Characters: Mr. Boldwood, Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Boldwood has been attempting to figure out how Bathsheba could have sent him such a forward valentine, with its bold seal stating, "Marry me." Here he watches Bathsheba across the room at the corn market as he tries to reconcile her lack of apparent interest in him with the flirtatious boldness put into evidence by the valentine. This passage suggests that Boldwood and Bathsheba are equally blind to the reality of their situations, though in different ways. Boldwood is too eager to create a reality based on too slim evidence: clinging to this apparent proof, he's willing to wave away any other, more convincing, objections. Bathsheba, meanwhile, failed to understand that such a careless decision might have great consequences—including the consequences of Boldwood's attraction, jealousy (as will be seen a few lines later as he watches her negotiate with another farmer), and ultimately obsession. Even while Bathsheba never manages to fall in love with Boldwood, then, the book suggests that in some ways their weaknesses have something similar about them: they both are faced with lessons to learn from such weakness, though Bathsheba will learn hers better than her suitor will.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ In every point of view ranging from politic to solicitous it was desirable that she, a lonely girl, should marry, and marry this earnest, well to do, and respected man. He was close to her doors: his standing was sufficient: his qualities were even supererogatory. Had she felt, which she did not, any wish whatever for the married state in the abstract, she could not reasonably have rejected him as a woman who frequently appealed to her understanding for deliverance from her whims.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene, Mr. Boldwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113-114

Explanation and Analysis

Boldwood has asked Bathsheba to marry her, and she considers this, her second marriage proposal, with slightly more reflection than her first. Having lived and grown a little more since she so eagerly, if thoughtlessly, ran after Gabriel, she now recognizes that marriage is not necessarily just a matter of love but also a social, economic, and moral question. She takes a step back in order to judge Boldwood as coolly as she judges the labor done on her farm: in this she finds little to object to in his character and social position. Bathsheba understands that while part of the problem in accepting Gabriel's proposal would have been their different social statuses, no such gap exists between herself and Boldwood. And his moral standing is no less suitable.

Nonetheless, Bathsheba's most well-considered judgments cannot make her desire something that she does not. It's not simply that Bathsheba doesn't love Boldwood; the book also emphasizes here that she doesn't want the "married

state" at all. Still, Bathsheba never declares that she'll never marry, that she refuses the institution as such; she simply wishes to remain independent for as long as it suits her, despite all the advantages to the contrary choice.

❝ Bathsheba would have submitted to an indignant chastisement for her levity had Gabriel protested that he was loving her at the same time: the impetuosity of passion unrequited is bearable, even if it stings and anathematizes; there is a triumph in the humiliation and tenderness in the strife. This is what she had been expecting, and what she had not got.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene, Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 117-118

Explanation and Analysis

Bathsheba has confided in Gabriel about Boldwood's feelings for her, and after she asks what he thinks of her conduct, he criticizes it sharply (though not cruelly). Bathsheba'a pride is hurt by this criticism, and she tries to account for it by suggesting that Gabriel merely wishes she'd marry him instead—but he softly corrects her, saying that he no longer thinks of or wishes for this. His apparent indifference seems almost malicious to Bathsheba when joined to his poor opinion of her behavior to Boldwood. While she herself can't imagine being with Gabriel, she likes to imagine that he's still in love with her, and the evidence to the contrary wounds her. Bathsheba finds it difficult to recognize that Gabriel, too, has a proud character, and that he too only reluctantly reveals all his weakness to others—perhaps why he's unwilling to share with Bathsheba that he still has feelings with her.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ He had been known to observe casually that in dealing with womankind the only alternative to flattery was cursing and swearing. There was no third method. "Treat them fairly and you are a lost man," he would say.

Related Characters: Sergeant Francis Troy (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Following Bathsheba's initial encounter with Troy, the novel paints a brief character sketch of the man, who is new to Weatherbury. Though he'll become Bathsheba's third suitor, is quite different from the first two. This passage explains some of his worldview, particularly relating to women. Already, Troy has flattered Bathsheba to the state of embarrassment, though she hasn't been sure whether to be pleased, offended, or suspicious. But Troy's flattery has little to do, it seems, with Bathsheba herself, or with Troy's own feelings: rather, it's a mode that he adopts whenever he finds himself around women, in order to best "deal" with them.

Troy's view of women is prejudiced and in many ways offensive. To him, women lack subtlety—he has to either flatter their vanity or yell at them—and he believes that women can be easily manipulated. Troy seems to understand the relationship between the sexes as a kind of contest, in which one person needs to win above the other. And it's a kind of performance or play, in which authenticity is replaced by good acting. One problem with this view, as the book will go on to show, is that it makes it difficult for Troy himself to know when his feelings are real rather than performed.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away.

Related Characters: Cain (Cainy) Ball, Sergeant Francis Troy

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

Such a description of Bathsheba, as she falls in love with Troy, relies upon prior characterizations of Bathsheba as independent, proud, and self-reliant. But it also attempts to describe women in general—and in that general thrust, seems not all too different from Troy's own characterization of "woman" in an earlier chapter. The novel is making the point that, given how much farther Bathsheba had to fall, her loss of self-reliance is more acute than that of a "weak"

woman. Once she abandons her self-reliance, her very sense of self is thrown into question, and she no longer knows how to define herself. As a result, the book suggests, she'll lean even more on Troy, becoming even more reckless and desperate. Character traits in general, it's suggested here, are not immutable but subject to change. This may be for the better—take Gabriel's growing maturity as a result of his own tragedy, for instance—but may also go awry.

❝ Though in one sense a woman of the world it was, after all, that world of daylight coteries, and green carpets, wherein cattle form the passing crowd and winds the busy hum; where a quiet family of rabbits or hares lives on the other side of your party-wall, where your neighbour is everybody in the tything, and where calculation is confined to market days. Of the fabricated tastes of good fashionable society she knew but little, and of the formulated self-indulgence of bad, nothing at all.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator continues to attempt to explain how Bathsheba, who until now has been independent, headstrong, and self-reliant, has fallen for Troy in so dramatic a way. It's not only that the distance she had to fall was so great—that point that was made in the previous quotation. Here, the book emphasizes the particular setting of the book, and the extent to which Bathsheba has been confined all her life in this setting. In many ways, Hardy does show that life in the countryside of England, in his fictionalized Wessex, is radically different than in the city. Bathsheba's "society" is made up of a "quiet family of rabbits" or cattle that "form the passing crowd." She has been ogled by other farmers, but has not yet had to navigate in an interpersonally complex social world that has its own codes and ways of doing things.

Hardy never states straight out that country life is simple while urban life is complex. Indeed, much of the novel shows the complexities and conflicts within natural laws. In this sense Bathsheba is increasingly a "woman of the world"; but the novel emphasizes that this world has little to do with another world that exists alongside it, and which Troy knows how to navigate deftly.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ "You are taking too much upon yourself!" she said vehemently. "Everybody is upon me—everybody. It is unmanly to attack a woman so! I have nobody in the world to fight my battles for me, but no mercy is shown. Yet if a thousand of you sneer and say things against me, I *will not* be put down!"

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene (speaker), Mr. Boldwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179-180

Explanation and Analysis

Bathsheba has attempted to avoid Boldwood, since she's just sent a letter to him telling him that she cannot marry him, but by the luck of circumstance she's run into him on the road anyway. Now Boldwood loses his grave, somber demeanor entirely, beginning to rage against his lot—recognizing not only that Bathsheba has refused him, but that her affections belong to another, to Troy. Bathsheba initially tries to suffer Boldwood's anger in silence, but when he claims that this is all "woman's folly," she begins to lose her temper herself.

Bathsheba is fed up with being judged, observed, and condemned on all sides. As a woman and the mistress of the farm, she is subject to more scrutiny than anyone else, and, in addition to that, she lacks a single other person who can truly understand what her situation is like. Her conflicts are all her own: there's no one she can turn to who might advise her exactly how to act or what to do. Bathsheba clearly understands the double standard that applies to her, and the unfairness of the way she's treated—even if she has erred gravely. At the end, nevertheless, she reclaims some of her pride, not to flatter herself but simply to maintain a sense of self and sanity in a hostile world.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ That same evening the sheep had trailed homeward head to tail, the behaviour of the rooks had been confused, and the horses had moved with timidity and caution.
Thunder was imminent, and taking some secondary appearances into consideration, it was likely to be followed by one of the lengthened rains which mark the close of dry weather for the season. [...] Oak gazed with misgiving at eight naked and unprotected ricks, massive and heavy with the rich produce of one half the farm for that year.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 209-210

Explanation and Analysis

As Troy prepares to lead a drunken party at the harvest supper, only Gabriel remains aware of the responsibility that's needed at the farm. As he's learned to do, Gabriel interprets certain elements of nature as warnings: the behavior of the sheep, rooks, and horses all suggests that a heavy storm is to come, and that humans would do well to heed such signals. Oak's own experience with the indifference of natural forces has taught him to respect them, rather than to dismiss them like Troy does. As this passage makes clear, the stakes are high on the farm, with income equaling to half the farm's annual produce in play. The tone of this section doesn't belittle such features but rather emphasizes the importance of the countryside—it is after all the country that is the source of the rest of the nation's nourishment, which lends an even greater sense of responsibility to the affair.

Having from their youth up been entirely unaccustomed to any liquor stronger than cider or mild ale, it was no wonder that they had succumbed one and all with extraordinary uniformity after the lapse of about one hour.
Gabriel was greatly depressed. This debauch boded ill for that wilful and fascinating mistress whom the faithful man even now felt within him as the eidolon of all that was sweet and bright and hopeless.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak, Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

In honor of his recent marriage to Bathsheba, Troy has declared an extra celebration as part of the annual harvest supper held at the farm. He's told all the women and children to go home and for all men (unless they're not up to the challenge—in which case they may risk losing their jobs) to enjoy brandy with him. Neither Bathsheba nor many of the farm hands wanted this extra level of revelry, but Troy insisted. Now, as Gabriel begins to prepare for a heavy storm, he sees that all the farm hands have fallen into a drunken stupor.

While he's upset and angry, Gabriel knows not to be too harsh on the men—it's Troy's fault that they've succumbed after such debauchery. He's upset that no one is able to assist him on the farm, but he's also upset because he recognizes that this is an inauspicious beginning to Bathsheba's own marriage. Gabriel knows how proud Bathsheba continues to be, how accustomed to insisting on her own will, but now that will is matched and perhaps exceeded, especially given that it's a man now in authority. This passage is a reminder that Gabriel's feelings for Bathsheba, his "eidolon" (an idealized, often phantom-like image), have not gone away: he watches with trepidation for the conflicts that he fears will ensue.

Chapter 39 Quotes

Oak, suddenly remembered that eight months before this time he had been fighting against fire in the same spot as desperately as he was fighting against water now—and for a futile love of the same woman.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

As Gabriel continues to battle against time in order to save the ricks from the storm, he recalls a similar moment and a similar set of actions—when he saved the farm from a fire right at the beginning of his time in Weatherbury. In some ways, Gabriel's situation has changed since then: he's in a more stable position, and is working his way into greater trust and responsibility on the farm. But in other ways, as this passage makes clear, little has changed at all: he's still in love with Bathsheba, even while he recognizes that she doesn't love him and that, especially now, their class positions are far too different for him to reasonably hope that she might change her mind. Such futility is underlined, for Gabriel, by the persistence and determination required to fight the laws of nature, over and over again. Nature doesn't care that he helped put out a fire months ago: its indifference is juxtaposed in a kind of tragic irony to Gabriel's own feelings of great consequence regarding the affairs on the farm.

All the night he had been feeling that the neglect he was labouring to repair was abnormal and isolated—the only instance of the kind within the circuit of the county. Yet at this very time, within the same parish, a greater waste had been going on, uncomplained of and disregarded. A few months earlier Boldwood's forgetting his husbandry would have been as preposterous an idea as a sailor forgetting he was in a ship.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak, Mr. Boldwood

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel has managed, with Bathsheba's help, to secure the ricks, keep the animals safe, and ensure that all the wealth and time represented by the farm's produce is kept safe from the storm. Throughout, he's thought bitterly about just how little Troy cared about the farm's well-being, not to mention the extent to which Troy's thoughtlessness prevented nearly everyone else on the farm from helping him as well. As a result, Gabriel has felt isolated and alone, fighting against the kind of neglect that would be unthinkable to most farmers.

Here, however, in conversation with Boldwood, he realizes that Troy isn't the only careless one in Weatherbury, even if Boldwood's negligence seems to come from a quite different place. Gabriel is particularly distressed because, unlike Troy, Boldwood wasn't always this way: according to Gabriel, the farmer used to be as at home in his fields as a sailor in a ship. Gabriel knows enough to guess what has changed: Boldwood's pride has been laid low by Bathsheba's marriage refusal and preference for Troy, and he's grown apathetic about everything else in his life. Gabriel realizes, here, that few others are paying attention to Boldwood's plight; it will be up to him, as it often is in such situations, to monitor the man, even if Boldwood is technically his own rival.

Chapter 42 Quotes

Her pride was indeed brought low by this despairing perception of spoliation by marriage with a less pure nature than her own. She chafed to and fro in rebelliousness, like a caged leopard, her whole soul was in arms, and the blood fired her face. Until she had met Troy Bathsheba had been proud of her position as a woman; it had been a glory to her to know that her lips had been touched by no man's on earth, that her waist had never been encircled by a lover's arm. She hated herself now.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene, Sergeant Francis Troy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

It hasn't been very long since Bathsheba married Troy, but the excitement of the courtship has certainly faded away. Now, it's become clear that Troy was never supportive of Bathsheba's pride even in its more valuable manifestations, in her independence and self-reliance. For a long time—up to and including her refusal of marriage to Gabriel and to Boldwood—Bathsheba had felt that the bar for giving up her independence had to be set high. Yet Troy didn't exactly meet such a bar; he simply seduced Bathsheba according to another logic entirely.

Bathsheba, though, hasn't quite learned to submit to her husband as he would like, and as the standards of Victorian society required. She understands that she does have to submit to many of her husband's decisions, but she doesn't like it, and refuses to accept his authority without difficulty. The description of Bathsheba as a "caged leopard" bolsters such an idea of liberty now penned in and a free spirit now in chains. Bathsheba's new situation of dependence doesn't precisely, however, make her despise her husband: it more accurately makes her despise herself, as someone who isn't able to maintain her own independence. This is portrayed as perhaps the greatest tragedy of Bathsheba's marriage.

Chapter 43 Quotes

Suddenly, as in a last attempt to save Bathsheba from, at any rate, immediate pain, he looked again as he had looked before at the chalk writing upon the coffin-lid. The scrawl was this simple one: "*Fanny Robbin and child*." Gabriel took his handkerchief and carefully rubbed out the two latter words. He then left the room, and went out quietly by the front door.

Related Characters: Gabriel Oak

Related Themes:

Page Number: 254

Explanation and Analysis

Gabriel has carried Fanny Robbin's coffin back to the farm, where Bathsheba has asked that it remain in her home before being taken to the churchyard the next day for burial. Although the book doesn't mention exactly how

Gabriel knows to look at the chalk writing, Gabriel is known to be an excellent observer and always discreet. He is one of the first to learn the secret of Fanny's pregnancy, and although this rumor will begin to spread throughout the village, it won't be because of him. Instead, Gabriel, as always, is eager to do whatever he can to make things easier for Bathsheba. He knows that, given the love of gossip among the villagers and the very small, interconnected world that they all inhabit, it will not be possible to keep this a secret for long. He may even suspect that Bathsheba may come to fully understand the relationship between Gabriel and Fanny. Unable to prevent that, nonetheless, Gabriel still wants to keep Bathsheba innocent and retaining some shred of pride for as long as possible.

Chapter 44 Quotes

❝ The one feat alone—that of dying—by which a mean condition could be resolved into a grand one, Fanny had achieved. And to that had destiny subjoined this reencounter to-night, which had, in Bathsheba's wild imagining, turned her companion's failure to success, her humiliation to triumph, her lucklessness to ascendancy; it had thrown over herself a garish light of mockery, and set upon all things about her an ironical smile. But even Bathsheba's heated fancy failed to endow that innocent white countenance with any triumphant consciousness of the pain she was retaliating for her pain with all the merciless rigour of the Mosaic law: "Burning for burning; wound for wound; strife for strife."

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene, Fanny Robbin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

Bathsheba has looked into the coffin and been given incontrovertible proof that Fanny was pregnant—between the color of her hair and the circumstantial evidence, she has guessed too that her own husband was the baby's father. Bathsheba's feelings for Fanny, nevertheless, remain very complex. On the one hand, she continues to feel pity for Fanny, who, like Bathsheba herself, suffered at the hands of Troy. Both women have felt alone and isolated in a world made by and for men. And yet on the other hand, Bathsheba recognizes Fanny as her full rival, especially since Bathsheba continues on some level to love her husband—and yet the fact of Fanny's death means that it would be cruel for Bathsheba to feel angry at or jealous of the girl.

Bathsheba seems almost to want Fanny's body to mock her, to give her a justification for hating her, even as she knows that would be wrong. While she cannot find any shred of "triumph" in Fanny's expression, Bathsheba thinks of the Mosaic law—the one that includes the idea of an "eye for an eye"—in helping her to come to terms with her own relationship to Fanny. Bathsheba, indeed, feels like she is being made to suffer personally in retaliation for what Fanny has suffered—suffering that, at least until this point, Troy has managed to escape entirely.

Chapter 47 Quotes

❝ The persistent torrent from the gargoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance into the grave. The rich tawny mould was stirred into motion, and boiled like chocolate. The water accumulated and washed deeper down, and the roar of the pool thus formed spread into the night as the head and chief among other noises of the kind formed by the deluging rain. The flowers so carefully planted by Fanny's repentant lover began to move and turn in their bed.

Related Characters: Fanny Robbin, Sergeant Francis Troy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

Troy has just completed perhaps the first major selfless act of his life, buying a fancy engraved tombstone for Fanny and spending a long time planting flowers around it. But as he sleeps, the narration moves to a description of the church, where the spurt from an old, ugly gargoyle is positioned in precisely the right place to wash out all the work that Troy has done. For Troy, this act has been one of penance and retribution: he's accepted, to a certain extent, his own guilt for what he has done, and hopes to account for it by this small gesture. What Troy, unlike Bathsheba, for instance, fails to understand is that penance (at least in this novel) doesn't work that way—it's never simply a single act that can be accomplished and the guilt done away with.

In addition, Troy has not yet felt the full coldness and indifference of nature's laws. He's a man of the town and is used to getting his own way rather than having to bow to a force greater than humans. Nature doesn't care where the water from the gargoyle pours down, even if it may seem like it's laughing in Troy's face. Unlike Gabriel, Troy won't learn a valuable lesson about the necessity of working within nature as a result of this event; instead, he'll react petulantly and run away again.

Chapter 52 Quotes

"I don't know—at least I cannot tell you. It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in a language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs."

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene (speaker), Mr. Boldwood

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

Boldwood is trying to convince Bathsheba once again to give him a positive response; this time, though, he's attempting to extract not an actual agreement to marry him, but a promise to at least consider marrying him in six years, since she's not yet a legal widow. As Bathsheba, who doesn't want to marry Boldwood any more than she ever has, tries to tell Boldwood that she does respect him, he insists on knowing exactly how much she likes and respects him. It's that demand that leads Bathsheba to the frustration she expresses in this passage. She's frustrated that Boldwood, as always, is asking more of her than she can give, pushing and pressuring her in a way she finds overwhelming, given that she has no one to turn to of her gender and social position.

Here, she links that sense of isolation to the very language she uses. It's not, of course, that only men speak English: the idea is that public life in society is, in her experience, directed by men—the laws that define and circumscribe everyone's actions, the articles in the newspapers, even the gossip at Warren's malt-house, are all written or spoken by men. Bathsheba may assert her own authority by claiming her own right to such language, but here she has a more sober outlook on the possibility of this act of reclamation, suggesting that a woman trying to play by men's rules may never be able to express herself just as she wishes.

Chapter 55 Quotes

The household convulsion had made her herself again. The temporary coma had ceased, and activity had come with the necessity for it. Deeds of endurance which seem ordinary in philosophy are rare in conduct: and Bathsheba was astonishing all around her now, for her philosophy was her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practise. She was the stuff of which great men's mothers are made.

Related Characters: Bathsheba Everdene

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

Boldwood has just shot Troy and has left the house in order to give himself up to the authorities. When Troy had ordered Bathsheba to come along home with him, she had been frozen in place: this was the culmination of the gradual erosion of her cool, calm sense of authority. Now, however, the crisis seems to have jolted her back into such an authoritative position. Just as in the corn market, everyone in Boldwood's home now looks at and admires her; here, however, Bathsheba isn't flattered. She is matter-of-fact about this ability to keep calm amid a tragedy. At the same time, even the novel itself, which mostly portrays Bathsheba as a competent and successful businesswoman, reveals itself to be a product of its time, describing Bathsheba not as a great woman herself but as the kind of woman who might give birth to a great son.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

We begin with a description of a farmer, Gabriel Oak, who is generally of good judgment and character, though lags a bit on Sundays—he yawns and thinks of dinner during Mass, for instance. When his friends are in a bad mood he's considered a bad man, and when they're happy they think the opposite: most of the time he's rather morally mixed. He wears a low felt hat and large, solid boots.

This initial character sketch emphasizes the everyday nature of the world that Hardy is creating, one that will deal in grand questions of fate, judgment, and morality, but which always nonetheless draws such grandness down to the proportions proper to country people.

Gabriel carries a small silver **watch**, once his grandfather's, which doesn't always work very well, such that Gabriel has to shake it and sometimes simply compare it to the stars or to the clocks in his neighbors' windows.

Gabriel's watch is in many ways humdrum like him, but it also underlines his sense of pragmatism and capacity for problem-solving—both admirable traits.

Gabriel's face maintains some aspects of a boy, though he has just left youth behind, only now reaching the flourishing of male life. He is no longer an impulsive young man, but he is not yet stabilized by wife and family: he is a twenty-eight-year-old bachelor.

The conclusion to Gabriel's character sketch underlines that he is at a moment of transition between youth and full adult self-sufficiency: it also suggests that a wife and family may lie in his future.

Gabriel is in a field by Norcombe Hill one December morning, when he sees a yellow wagon winding down it. The wagon reaches the other side of a hedge where he's resting, then stops. The driver tells the girl sitting atop it, next to a number of plants, that the tailboard has fallen. The girl asks him to go back and fetch it. As she waits, she looks down at a package tied in paper. She looks to see if the driver is returning, then reaches and unties it to reveal a looking-glass, which she peers into and smiles, then blushes.

The setting of the novel, the country landscape of Wessex, includes vistas and sloping land that allow the characters to survey what is going on around them and learn about the goings-on of others. This unknown girl is a natural part of such a landscape, but she also conforms to stereotypes about women's vanity, though she knows she should hide it.

Gabriel recognizes that the lady has no reason for looking, whether adjusting her hat or patting her hair: she just looks at herself, almost triumphantly. Perhaps, though, he is just imagining this, he thinks. The wagoner returns and she slips the mirror back in.

Gabriel's initial view of this lady is not exactly positive, as he recognizes that vanity and pride alone are the occasion for her actions.

Gabriel withdraws and turns down the road until he reaches the bottom of the hill, where there's a dispute concerning the toll payment. The driver says that according to the lady, he's paid enough: the turnpike keeper says he won't pass unless he pays two pence more. Gabriel steps forward and gives two pence to the gatekeeper, then looks up at her.

Still, it seems that Gabriel doesn't entirely despise the lady, who retains enough allure and mystery for him that he wants to help her, despite what he's observed about her apparent superficiality.

The woman looks carelessly back, then tells her driver to go on. The gatekeeper tells Gabriel that she is handsome: Gabriel says she has faults: the gatekeeper suggests it's cheapness, but Gabriel says, "Vanity."

Now it's Gabriel's pride that's hurt by the woman's lack of concern for him, underlining his conviction about her pride and vanity.

CHAPTER 2

It is the eve of St. Thomas (December 21) and Norcombe Hill is covered by ancient beech trees, which shelter one slope from the growling blasts of wind and shaking of the dry leaves on the ground. Between the hill and horizon is a sheet of shadow: one might stand and listen as these trees wail to the others. The sky is clear, the constellations sparkling, such that an observer might feel the very turn of the earth.

A number of the book's chapters begin with such descriptions of the country landscape. Like others, this description suggests both a tranquil, calm, and natural beauty, but also a sense that within this vast world humans are largely insignificant.

The sounds of Farmer Gabriel's flute begin to pierce the silence. They come from a shepherd's hut under a plantation hedge, which looks like a small Noah's Ark against the plain.

The comparison to Noah's Ark is in part earnest but also a teasingly inapt comparison, given the homeliness of Gabriel's cottage.

Only in the past year has Gabriel been called "Farmer." As a boy he was a shepherd, then a bailiff, before leasing the **sheep** farm that includes Norcombe Hill and stocking it with 200 sheep—a venture that he recognizes as requiring great responsibility.

This is an example of the kind of social mobility that was available in the English countryside at the time—Gabriel is able to establish himself as a self-sufficient farmer.

Holding a lantern, Gabriel comes out and paces the well-cleared fields slowly but deliberately. He carries a new-born **lamb** back into the hut and places it on hay in front of the stove before going to sleep. The inside of the hut is cozy and small. The lamb is revived, begins to bleat, and wakens Gabriel, who carries it back outside to its mother, and determines the time—one o'clock—from the stars. He stands still, appreciating the beauty of the sky.

Gabriel's serious, determined attitude seems to suggest that he is on the right path to becoming a successful farmer. This includes being careful to monitor the status of all the animals and take care of them when they seem to be waning. Gabriel's ability to read the stars shows that he is able to navigate the demands of nature better than many.

Then Gabriel sees an artificial light some yards away. He walks towards it and remembers that there's a shed here. Peering inside from the roof, he sees two women and two cows. One woman is older, while the other is young, though he can only see her "as Satan first saw Paradise" (that is, from above). The elder says they'll go home now; the other yawns and says she wishes they were rich enough to pay a man to do these things.

Gabriel shows himself again to be well-attuned to his surroundings and alert to any change in the natural landscape. But he's also not entirely mature—he doesn't hesitate to spy on two women, who are discussing the difficulties of being self-sufficient women.

Calling the elder woman "aunt," the young woman says her hat has blown away. Gabriel sees a small, newborn calf between the two cows, and realizes what they're here for. The aunt says there's no more bran, so the niece says she'll ride over for it in the daylight, even without a side saddle, as her aunt protests.

Like Gabriel, these two women are also responsible for other living creatures. The niece seems to be the one of the pair who's in a position of authority.

This makes Gabriel even more curious to see her features, though he immediately assumes she's beautiful. In a sudden coincidence, though, the girl drops the cloak tied tight around her, and as her black hair falls over her jacket, Gabriel immediately recognizes her as the girl from the yellow wagon.

Gabriel has a romantic notion that any woman who's independent-minded enough to ride side-saddle must also be beautiful; now he recognizes that such a woman can also be proud and vain.

CHAPTER 3

Gabriel walks back to his plantation, lost in thought. At the bottom of the hill, he sees the girl on a pony from afar, and wonders if she's come to look for her hat. Suddenly he sees it lying in a ditch, and takes it back to his hut. The girl rides up to the hedge lining the hut, and he is about to emerge, when he sees the girl look around as to see if anyone's there, then easily slip down the back of the horse, then ride it side-saddle—unexpected for a woman.

Gabriel is becoming more and more adept at spying on this woman from afar, a tendency that is paired awkwardly with his own judgments about the woman's character and behavior. Here we're given another example about the woman's lack of concern for certain gender norms.

Amused and surprised, Gabriel returns to his **sheep**. An hour later, the girl returns seated properly, with a bag of bran. A boy meets her near the cattle shed; they milk the cow together. Gabriel leaves and waits for her outside. She emerges, bright and cheerful, and seems surprised to see Gabriel's face from behind the hedge. Gabriel, meanwhile, notices her severe, regular features, better-proportioned than most girls, though her neck and shoulders are entirely covered—the line of the unseen being higher here than in towns.

Gabriel watches as the girl deftly navigates another of the tasks necessary in the country, taking charge once again. For the first time, he is able to look at her in the face. Although he's come to characterize her as vain and independent, the woman also is undeniably a creature of the country, not of the town with its own class emblems and norms.

Gabriel blushes a little and says he found a hat. She says it blew away last night—one o'clock, he says, since he was here. She asks about his farm, then says she had needed her hat this morning to ride to town. He says he knows—he saw her going down the hill—and meets her eyes. Now she is the one to blush extravagantly, while he politely turns away. Still waiting, he hears a sound and looks up: she's left. Feeling somewhere between tragic and comic, Gabriel goes back to work.

Gabriel's calm, reasoned demeanor evaporates once he has to talk to the woman in person. It's unclear whether Gabriel means to alert the woman as to the fact that he saw her in not exactly feminine actions, but either way, it's Gabriel who ends up seeming more abashed than she does.

Each day for five days, the woman returns regularly to milk the cow, but ignores Gabriel —the fact that he saw her, and let her know, has offended her, making her feel inappropriate.

Together with Bathsheba's vanity comes a sense of pride that makes her reluctant to associate with someone who's seen her at a weak moment.

One evening that week, though, a frost spreads over the land, and finally Gabriel returns inside to get warm. The wind keeps getting in, though, and for a moment he decides to keep both the door and ventilating hole closed to warm up, even though the fire needs ventilation. Gabriel falls asleep without closing either, and when he opens his eyes, his head is on the girl's lap. Seeming amused, she says it was remarkable that he wasn't suffocated, and scolds him for keeping the vent and door closed. Absently, Gabriel agrees, feeling a mix of embarrassment and pleasure. She says she heard his dog howling, and found him near dead.

Gabriel may be dutiful and hard-working, but he's still new at farming, which becomes clear as he makes the mistake of falling asleep without making sure that he's safe as a fire is roaring. Now it's Gabriel's turn to have his pride wounded at having to be saved, although, unlike Bathsheba, he does feel a more complicated mix of emotions—his fascination with her includes both admiration and skepticism.

Gabriel says she's saved his life, and asks her name: she says he may ask for it at her aunt's. He tells her his own, and they banter, before he asks to take her hand. After an instant he lets it go, then says he's sorry he did—she gives it back to him. She asks if he'd like to kiss it; when he says he wasn't thinking of that, she snatches it away, then teasingly tells him to find out her name, before leaving.

For the first time, Gabriel allows his feelings of attraction to overcome his more judgmental sentiments towards her. Bathsheba, in turn, may be a simple woman from the country, but she is a natural at teasing and flirting, as her behavior shows.

CHAPTER 4

While the narrator claims that only unconscious superiority is acceptable in women, conscious superiority can sometimes be pleasing to men as well. This is what happens to Gabriel, who begins to wait for the woman every day and watch for her through the hedge. He finds out that her name is Bathsheba Everdene, and that in a week her cow will give no more milk. She no longer comes up the hill.

Sometimes the narrator intrudes to make more general statements about women, espousing notions that may seem out of date to readers today. Nonetheless, this judgment is in the service of accounting for Gabriel's attraction to Bathsheba despite her faults.

Gabriel repeats her name over and over. Then it dawns on him that marriage might be a way to resolve such silliness. But he needs an excuse to visit Bathsheba's aunt. Then, one of his ewes dies: he decides to carry its **lamb** in a basket over to Mrs. Hurst, the aunt, accompanied by his dog George.

It takes a little time for Gabriel even to understand that he's fallen in love with Bathsheba, given the inauspicious beginning of his acquaintance with her: now, though, he shows the same resolve as in farming.

Gabriel has dressed and prepared properly, not too over-the-top, though he's used all the hair oil he has. He walks up to the garden gate and sees a cat, which seizes up at the sight of George. A voice from inside exclaims that the nasty brute wanted to kill the poor dear of the cat. Gabriel calls in that George is meek and mild, but no one responds.

The tongue-in-cheek description of Gabriel suggests that he may not look as sophisticated as he'd like, using a bit too much hair oil, for instance. The courting call, like Gabriel's relationship with Bathsheba, doesn't begin very well either.

Abashed, Gabriel goes to the door, and asks for Miss Everdene, saying "somebody" would like to see her—an example of the modesty but also ill breeding of the rural world, the narrator notes. Mrs. Hurst says Bathsheba is out but invites him in, and he says he's brought a **lamb** for her to rear, as girls like to do. Then Gabriel says that his real reason for coming is to ask if she'd like to marry him. Gabriel asks if Bathsheba has any other men interested; Mrs. Hurst says there's quite many, as she's so pretty and intelligent. She was once going to be a governess, but was too wild. Gabriel says he's an everyday man: his only hope was to be the first suitor. Dejected, he takes his leave.

In another narrative aside, we learn more about the differences between town and country life: the latter is more simple and straightforward, without the ornate standards of the city, but also without its sophistication. The scene that follows, though, suggests that country people are not necessarily as simple-minded as they seem: Mrs. Hurst seems to imply that Bathsheba is a great catch for a man, more valuable than a poor farmer can hope for.

After a hundred yards, Gabriel hears a voice: Bathsheba is running after him, and he blushes. She pauses, out of breath and panting, and says her aunt made a mistake in sending her away. Gabriel gratefully cries that he's sorry to have made her run so fast. But Bathsheba continues that it was a pity to have him think she's had multiple sweethearts, when she's never had one.

Bathsheba had flirted with and teased Gabriel such that he could believe she's had more suitors than only him; now, though, she hastens to inform him that in fact this is all new for her as well, and that she has no experience with men despite her confidence.

Gabriel seizes her hand, but she releases it. He says he has a nice farm, and works hard, even if he is only an everyday man. He steps forward, but Bathsheba backs away, and with round eyes says she never agreed to marry him. Dismayed, Gabriel asks why she ran after him. She eagerly says that she hates to be thought of as a man's property, so she just wanted to settle the false news.

At first, Gabriel thought that the only reason Bathsheba could be returning is to accept his offer. But once again, her pride is what she thinks about above all else—rather than what Gabriel might think of her actions, for instance—as she hastens to convince him of her own independence.

Gabriel asks if she might reconsider, given how he loves her. She says she'll try to think, if he'll give her time. He lists what he might be able to give her as a husband, but when he says they'll share everything—he'll be there whenever she looks up at home by the fire, and vice versa—her face falls and she repeats she doesn't want to marry him. She says she wouldn't mind being a bride at a wedding, but she doesn't want a husband to go with it.

At first, Bathsheba goes back and forth on whether or not to consider Gabriel's offer of marriage. But it's the element that he might think most appealing—the sharing of everything—that convinces her, a woman used to having her own mind and doing things her own way, to refuse him.

Gabriel asks why Bathsheba can't marry him: she says she doesn't love him. Gabriel says he's fine with her just liking him, though she protests. He tells her he'll love her, long for her, and continue to want her until he dies. Distressed, she regrets running after him: she says she's too independent, and he'd never be able to tame her. Besides, she's poor, better educated than him, and doesn't love him. He should marry a woman with money to help with the farm.

Now Gabriel becomes willing to settle for less and less from Bathsheba, a simple partnership rather than a pact of love. Recognizing the extent of Gabriel's feelings for her, Bathsheba begins to understand that she erred in running after him simply to correct his mistaken impression.

Gabriel, surprised and admiring, says he'd been thinking of that himself. But this disconcerts Bathsheba, though he hastily says that it is in spite of that that he can't help loving her. But she laughs nervously and asks him to stop pressing her. Gabriel finally, firmly, agrees, with the air of someone devoting the rest of his life to Scripture, saying he'll ask her no more.

Gabriel too is new at love, as is evident by the way he stumblingly agrees that Bathsheba isn't wealthy enough to help him establish himself. The chapter ends with another allusion, half earnest and half ironic, that invests Gabriel with Biblical grandeur.

CHAPTER 5

Gabriel hears that Bathsheba has left the neighborhood for a place called Weatherbury—the separation allows him to idealize her even more. He concentrates on his farming instead. One of Gabriel's sheep-dogs, George, is clever and trustworthy. His son doesn't resemble George much—he is slow to learn and yet earnest, eager to chase the flocks in any direction whatsoever.

Rather than watching Bathsheba milk the cows, Gabriel can now visualize her in the abstract, as a beautiful, charming woman rather than an independent one. At the same time, Gabriel continues to work to establish himself in a stable life as a farmer.

On the edge of the hill is a chalk pit, bordered by two hedges, which leave a narrow opening covered only by a rough railing. One night Gabriel returns home and calls to the dogs: only George answers, but Gabriel remembers he had left the two dogs eating a dead **lamb** on the hill, so he goes to bed. Just before dawn, he hears a strange sound of sheep-bells—realizing that it means the sheep are running quickly.

The first time something went awry, Gabriel didn't manage to wake up in time and had to be saved by Bathsheba. Now he's learned to remain more alert, understanding that he holds a great deal of responsibility over his property.

Gabriel jumps out of bed and races up the hill: all the two hundred are gone. At the hedge, a gap appears. Gabriel follows, but they're not in the plantation, and there's no answer to his calls. Then he sees, at the edge of the chalk pit, the young dog against the sky, silent and still like Napoleon at St. Helena. Horrified, Gabriel races through, seeing the **sheep**'s footprints. The dog comes and licks his hand. Gabriel looks over the cliff, and sees the carcasses lying at its foot.

The comparison of Gabriel's dog to the emperor Napoleon is meant to seem hyperbolic, but it's also a way for the novel to underscore the high stakes and tragic dimensions of a world that may seem inconsequential, given its distance from urban centers. We are, indeed, meant to see Gabriel as a tragic figure.

Gabriel's first impulse is to feel pity and sorrow for the fate of the animals—then he remembers that the **sheep** are not insured, and his life's savings are gone. He leans against a rail and covers his face with his hands. Soon, though, he rises up, and gives thanks that Bathsheba hadn't married him.

Gabriel's general decency shines through even at a moment of tragedy—and this is a tragic moment in the book, one that remains untouched by any comic deflation or ironic touch.

In a daze, Gabriel realizes that the young dog must have been in high energy to drive all the **sheep** into a corner, through the hedge, across the field, and given them enough momentum to break down the railing and hurl over the edge. The dog is shot at noon that day, the fate of many who take reasoning to its logical conclusion, the narrator says. Gabriel sells everything he owns to be able to clear his debts, and is left with only the clothes on his back.

This tragedy is a sobering lesson for Gabriel about the ways in which circumstances can be beyond one's own control, and natural forces intervene against the best-laid plans. The shooting of the dog is portrayed as a similarly grim, similarly illogical solution, though also as simply the way things are done.

CHAPTER 6

Two months later, there is a yearly hiring fair in the town of Casterbridge, with several hundred farm and other laborers waiting. Gabriel is among them, asking if anyone needs a bailiff. He is paler, poorer, now, but also has a dignified air of calm and an indifference to fate which is noble, not villainous.

Gabriel has learned a great deal about responsibility and about the cold indifference of natural circumstances: while he has lost his livelihood and all his savings, he has gained a maturity that others lack.

At the end of the day, Gabriel hasn't been hired, and he realizes that all the farmers seem to want shepherds. He has a shepherd's crook made in a smith shop, then exchanges his overcoat for a smockfrock. A few farmers do talk to him, but the news that he had his own farm make many suspicious of him.

Gabriel was a bailiff (a farm manager or superintendent) after beginning as a simple shepherd: now he recognizes that he must go back two steps rather than just one in order to move forward at all.

That evening Gabriel draws out his flute, playing it with "Arcadian" sweetness, and makes a few shillings that way. He learns of another fair the next day at Shottsford, near Weatherbury. Recognizing the name, Gabriel decides to set off the six miles for Shottsford (though he wants to avoid the sight of Bathsheba). He follows a winding path through the landscape. After six miles all is black. Gabriel ascends a hill and passes by a deserted wagon. He eats some bread and cheese and falls asleep in it.

Gabriel had heard that Weatherbury was the place where Bathsheba had moved after leaving his neighborhood of Norcombe, and the familiarity alone is something for him to cling onto, now that he's lost everything. Gabriel is portrayed as without bitterness in these pages: he is determined to do what it takes to survive.

After awhile, Gabriel awakens to find that the wagon is moving. Peering out from the hay, Gabriel hears the driver and his partner who are speaking, in country slang, about a handsome woman—though she's also vain. Laughing, they agree that she's said to look in the mirror before she goes to bed every night. And she's not married! they exclaim. Gabriel suddenly wonders if they're talking about Bathsheba.

The passages in country slang are some of the most humorous in the novel, chances for Hardy to show his in-depth knowledge of country life even as he makes fun of it. The men's talk of woman's vanity might seem stereotypical, but in Gabriel's view may well refer to one woman in particular.

Gabriel slips out of the wagon, unseen. As he prepares to walk on, he sees an unusual light about half a mile away. He realizes something is on fire. He follows the direction of the flame, and his tired face is covered with an orange glow—it's the rickyard, where hay is kept. A rick (that is, a haystack) is glowing, flames darting in and out. As smoke is blown aside, Gabriel sees that the rick is part of a large group, making the danger even greater. Then he comes across another man, running about and crying for Mark Clark, Billy Smallbury, Joseph Poorgrass, and Matthew Moon. Other figures appear and confusedly get to work.

Gabriel surveys the landscape around him in order to, as usual, best understand how to navigate in an uncertain environment. Although he is exhausted, he immediately recognizes the danger of the fire—something he's learned to respect, having nearly been killed by it himself. Gabriel is an interloper in this scene—he doesn't yet know any of the people mentioned in this passage—but he feels immediately implicated in the crisis.

Gabriel takes control, and begins to shout orders to the disorganized group. He clambers himself up to the top of the barn, with Billy Smallbury, one of the men who had been in the wagon, and Mark Clark, another farmhand. They beat the stack and try to dislodge any fiery pieces of hay. The villagers below do all they can to keep the blaze under control. At a distance, two women wonder who the young shepherd beating the fire with his crook might be. No one knows, they say. One asks Jan Coggan, nearby, if he thinks the fire is safe—he says he thinks so

Although no one knows who Gabriel is, he finds himself a natural leader, as he maintains his cool under pressure and manages to organize the disordered villagers and get the fire under control. While Gabriel hadn't proved appealing enough to Bathsheba, here it is his actions that begin to establish how others think about him, including these villagers.

One of the women, on horseback, asks if anyone knows the shepherd's name: she tells the other woman, Mary-ann, to thank him once he gets the fire under control. As she approaches Gabriel, he descends and asks where her master the farmer is. Mary-ann says it's a mistress: she has recently arrived to take over her uncle's farm, since he died suddenly. She's very wealthy, a bystander says. Mary-ann points her out to Gabriel; he lifts his hat in respect, then asks if she happens to need a shepherd. She lifts the veil from her face: it's Bathsheba. She doesn't speak, and he mechanically repeats his question.

Little by little, the identity of this woman on horseback begins to grow clear to Gabriel—first, given her position of authority on horseback, then because of what he learns about her role on her uncle's farm, the reason for which Bathsheba was supposed to have left Weatherbury. As the chapter ends, an air of awkwardness lingers, as the pair that has shared some intimacy meets again.

CHAPTER 7

Bathsheba is between amusement and concern: she's not embarrassed. Hesitatingly, she says she does need a shepherd. The bystanders all say that he's the one to hire. She asks them to tell him to speak to the bailiff, then rides off. Gabriel asks Bailiff Pennyways to get him a lodging; the bailiff can't, but tells him he might have luck at Warren's Malthouse.

Bathsheba recognizes the awkwardness of the situation, but unlike the first time Gabriel saw her, she's no longer ashamed—he has seen her at her moment of vanity. The villagers as a group will, throughout the book, espouse general public opinion.

Gabriel, astonished, walks to the village, thinking too of how quickly Bathsheba has changed from naïve girl to cool, calm supervisor. As he passes through the churchyard, he sees a pale, slim girl. He wishes her goodnight, then asks if she's on the way to Warren's Malthouse. She says yes, then, seemingly cheered by his friendliness, asks if he knows how late the Buck's Head Inn is open. He says he's not from Weatherbury; he's just a shepherd (though she remarks that he seems like a farmer). She asks him not to mention in the parish that he's seen her, at least for a day or two, as she's poor and wants to keep anonymous. Gabriel agrees, then, hesitating, offers her a shilling. Gratefully, she accepts, and as he touches her wrist, he feels a throb of "tragic intensity" that he's often felt in his over-driven **lambs**.

Although Bathsheba had become recognizable to Gabriel over the course of the last few pages, he now marvels at how much she's changed now that she's a wealthy landowner—a position that launches her into an entirely different realm than Gabriel, especially now that he's penniless. Bathsheba's newfound stature also contrasts profoundly to the precariousness and vulnerability of the girl that Gabriel meets at the churchyard: she seems to need the same kind of care and attention as his animals.

CHAPTER 8

As Gabriel approaches the Malthouse, he hears voices inside. The room is lit only from the kiln, which casts a glow onto the owner, the maltster, an elderly man with white hair sitting by the fire. The conversation stops, and everyone looks up at Gabriel, recognizing him as the hero of the fire. The owner, learning his name, cries that he knew both Gabriel's grandparents. His son, Jacob, says that his own son Billy might have known Gabriel, but Billy says it was his brother Andrew: Gabriel agrees. He was just talking about the Oaks with his youngest daughter Liddy, Billy says.

Although Gabriel is new in Weatherbury, the (fictional) area of Wessex is the definition of a small world, where families remain for generations and anyone who lives long enough, like the maltster, can identify any newcomer who happens to arrive. Other members of the Smallbury family are introduced too, all economically dependent on Bathsheba and her farm.

Jacob hands some malt to Gabriel, who says he doesn't need a clean cup. Mark Clark approves of this. Jan Coggan gives an older man, Henry Fray, some of his own cup to drink. Henry always signs his name "Henery," insisting that this was the name with which he was christened. Coggan invites Mark Clark, who is always amused and social, to join the drinking.

Gabriel fits in well in this jovial, friendly group: he has no airs like a person from a town or city might, and fades into his surroundings to allow the others, who are more talkative, to continue to hold court at the malt-house.

Coggan calls over to Joseph Poorgrass, saying he hasn't drunk anything. Joseph tells the group that he blushes every time he sees the new mistress, though he's always been shy. Jacob Smallbury tells Gabriel that such shyness is becoming for a woman, though awkward for a man: Gabriel agrees. The others chime in with more stories about Poorgrass's bashfulness.

This is a group of people that knows each other well enough to identify and acknowledge each small attribute of each farm hand. Gabriel is simply expected to nod and acquiesce at the general opinions expressed by the group.

Gabriel asks what kind of place this farm is and what the mistress is like, but it appears that she's only been here a few days. Coggan says he used to court his first wife Charlotte, a dairy maid, at Farmer Everdene's, and he was kind and generous, plying him with ale. He'd eat salt beforehand so he could drink as much as possible. Coggan begins to talk ruefully of Charlotte's death.

Someone in the malt-house has a story associated with any detail or piece of information about the village or farm, including the inhabitants, past and present: while Bathsheba is new to the farm hands, they will be able to compare her to her uncle and his management.

Trying to keep the conversation on track, Gabriel asks about Miss Everdene's parents. They were town folk, Jacob says, and gentlemanly—but the husband lost hundreds of pounds in gold. He was a fickle husband, Coggan chimes in, whose will to be good wasn't strong enough. Henery Fray remarks that Bathsheba was never that pretty then, and Coggan remarks he hopes her temper is as nice as her face.

Gabriel has to be insistent in order to keep the conversation on track and learn what interests him, as the group does certainly possess a great deal of knowledge about Bathsheba's family. The hands often tend to judge women's appearances casually.

Henery begins to complain about Bailiff Pennyway's thieving ways, but Gabriel interrupts to remark that the maltster must be very old to have such aged sons. Jacob says his father's so old he no longer minds his age. The maltster says he can't recall the year he was born, but has lived in various places: he mentions each while nodding in its direction. After listing them all, he asks how many years that accounts for—another old man says a hundred and seventeen, so the maltster concludes that's his age. But the cup they're drinking out of, he adds, is older than himself.

Gabriel is interested in Bathsheba's family because of the feelings he continues to nurse for her, but he's also curious about maltster, a true fount of local knowledge. In general, the malt-house guests function in the novel as a kind of Greek chorus, which in ancient Greek plays would comment periodically on what was going on and give a gloss on the events.

Henery cries to Gabriel that he's sure he saw him fluting at Casterbridge: Gabriel blushes and says he's struggling to get by. Coggan asks Gabriel to play for them, and he does. A young man, Laban Tall (known mostly as "Susan Tall's husband"), remarks that he can play well. Poorgrass remarks that he's a clever man, and they should be grateful to have such a man for a shepherd, especially for their wives' and daughters' sakes. Even more so given how handsome he is, they all say. Gabriel thanks them modestly, but decides to himself that he'll never let Bathsheba see him playing his flute (a wisdom worthy of Minerva).

Gabriel had taken up his flute to make a few shillings, and, as is typical in Weatherbury, he cannot escape scrutiny or comment from one person or another. But Gabriel is slowly establishing trust among the other farm hands, which will prove important as he attempts to establish himself in Weatherbury. Another classical allusion, this time to the Roman goddess of wisdom, elevates Gabriel just as the townspeople do.

Laban Tall is the first to leave, followed by Henery Fray. Gabriel leaves with Coggan, who's offered him lodging. Then Henery returns, out of breath, to remark that Bathsheba has in fact caught Bailiff Pennyways stealing some barley. Miss Everdene flew at him, and he ran away.

When one person learns of news, it's soon common knowledge throughout, thanks to the newspaper-like role of the malt-house in spreading information.

As Henery rests, Laban Tall returns, remarking at more news: Fanny Robbin (Miss Everdene's youngest servant) can't be found. Mary-ann is worried something's happened—Fanny was in low spirits recently. They all hasten up to the main house, except the maltster, who remains inside like always. From the bedroom window Bathsheba calls down to ask if any of the men can make inquiries about Fanny. Jacob asks if any young man in the parish has been courting her. No one thinks it's the case: Bathsheba says any respectable lover would have come to the house. But she's concerned that Fanny was last seen outside the house with only an indoor working gown on—not something to wear to her young man.

The fact that the maltster never leaves the tavern is another comical detail that lightens the mood of the novel, which is structured around stable, unchanging elements that remain fixed even as the circumstances of other characters are in flux. Fanny's private life is discussed at length here—it's surprising, in fact, that no one has yet admitted to knowing something more about her disappearance, given how difficult it is for secrets to remain so in Weatherbury.

Then, though, Mary-ann says she did have a young man, a soldier in Casterbridge. Bathsheba asks Billy Smallbury to go tomorrow to find him. Uneasily, she wishes every goodnight. Meanwhile, Gabriel is just content at being able to see Bathsheba in the flesh.

Mary-ann undoes some of the mystery by suggesting that Fanny does, in fact, have a lover—in this novel, a potentially dangerous sign of vulnerability for a woman.

CHAPTER 9

Bathsheba's farm had once been the center of a manor, though now it is more modest. Moss covers the gravel walk, giving a sleepy feeling to the place. The house is creaky and porous, and upstairs Bathsheba and her servant and companion, Liddy Smallbury (about her age), are sorting through papers from the prior owner. Liddy has the features of a lighthearted country girl, half earnest, half prim.

This description of the setting characterizes Bathsheba's farm, too, as one of the stable sites of the novel around which the characters and their changing situations are clustered. While the scene seems bucolic, in a novel by Hardy it's never that simple.

Mary-ann Money, the charwoman, is scrubbing outside, when Bathsheba asks her to pause: they hear a horse clap up to the door. Mrs. Coggan, the maid, opens the door to a deep voice. She goes upstairs to say that Mr. Boldwood wants to see her, but Bathsheba is not dressed well enough. She orders Mrs. Coggan to tell him she's dusting bottles and can't come down. The voice simply says he wanted to ask if Fanny Robbin had been found, and he leaves.

While the malt-house is a realm of men, the interior of Bathsheba's home is a space for women's affairs, only interrupted for a special occasion by men. Bathsheba both helps out around the house like the other women and is to be distinguished from them, as the woman of authority.

Bathsheba asks who Mr. Boldwood is. Liddy says he's a 40-year-old, unmarried gentleman farmer. He had put Fanny through school, so takes an interest after her. Many girls had tried to have him court her, but to no avail. Teddy Coggan, a small boy, comes up to the women and cries that Mr. Boldwood gave him a penny for opening the gate. He'd asked if Miss Everdene is an old woman, and he said yes, only because he was given a penny for it. Disconcerted, Bathsheba tells Mary-ann to go back to her errands.

As Gabriel relied on the malt-house guests, now Bathsheba—also a newcomer—relies on the local knowledge of her servant and companion Liddy to learn more about the other characters in Weatherbury. Teddy's story does seem to suggest that Mr. Boldwood was curious about more than just Fanny's well-being when he arrived at the porch.

Now alone, Liddy asks Bathsheba if anyone ever wanted to marry her. After a pause, she said one man did once, but he wasn't quite good enough for her, though she liked him. They hear footsteps again, and out the window see a crooked file of men approach.

Liddy and Bathsheba are in some ways friends, but also in an unequal position: Bathsheba can either agree to confide in her, or withhold that camaraderie.

CHAPTER 10

After changing, Bathsheba enters the kitchen, where the men have gathered, and pours out some coins on the table. Bathsheba begins by announcing that she's resolved to manage everything herself rather than hire a new bailiff—this is met with amazement. Then she asks if anyone's found Fanny: no one has, but Billy isn't yet back from Casterbridge.

Bathsheba is beginning her new role as mistress of the farm in earnest, but her insistence that she's able to manage everything herself is juxtaposed with the skepticism of the men, who find it difficult to imagine that a woman can be in a position of authority.

Bathsheba calls for Joseph Poorgrass and asks what he does on the farm and what he earns for it. Then she gives him his earnings, plus ten shillings as she's a newcomer. But she blushes at her own generosity, and Henery Fray lifts his eyebrows. Next is Matthew Moon, and then Andrew Candle (a new man), who stutters, so Henery reports his earnings. Laban Tall approaches next, and his wife steps up as well: she's forty but claims to be and passes for younger, and is shrill and stern: she speaks for her husband.

One by one, Bathsheba officially meets each one of her hands, and continues to play the role of the confident, cool authority figure. Nonetheless, there are a few moments of uncertainty, as when Bathsheba isn't quite sure how generous she should be. The relationship between Laban and Susan Tall is an example of a different kind of gendered relationship.

Henery Fray says the shepherd will need someone under him: Cain Ball is a good pick. Bathsheba asks how he came by his name; Henery says his mother, not one to read Scripture, mixed up Cain and Abel at his christening and didn't find out until too late. They soften the name, though, by calling him Cainy. The poor woman cried and cried: she was raised by heathen parents, so it wasn't her fault.

Hardy relies upon his readers to know the Genesis story of Cain and Abel: Cain murdered his brother Abel, though Cainy Ball's mother thought it was Cain who was the holy, chosen victim. The villagers are vaguely familiar with the Bible, but the book plays down its sacred solemnity.

Bathsheba asks Gabriel if he understands his duties: Gabriel does, but is stunned by her coolness—he wonders if her social rise has changed her character. The same happened, the narrator said, with Jove's family when they moved into the peak of Olympus.

Class differences have perhaps driven a wedge between the pair. Meanwhile, the narrator again elevates Gabriel to mythic proportions, but again this is perhaps tongue-in-cheek.

Billy Smallbury arrives, and says Fanny has run away with the soldiers. Her young man's regiment has left for Melchester. He only found out that the soldier was higher than a private. Bathsheba says someone should tell Mr. Boldwood. As she rises, she makes a short speech saying that though she's a woman, she'll do her best, and no one should suppose that she can't tell the difference between good and bad affairs. She'll be awake and at work before anyone, and will astonish them all. They all acquiesce heartily.

The first part of this scene, with the sobering news about Fanny, only creates a greater contrast with Bathsheba's own confident, authoritative demeanor. Although some of the farm hands have expressed doubt about her ability to manage a farm on her own, as a woman, they seem—at least in her presence—to acknowledge her authority now.

CHAPTER 11

On a dark, snowy night, at a public path by a river and a high wall on Melchester Moor, it seems that the cloudy heavens and white earth are closing in on each other. A clock strikes ten and a small outline emerges on the path. The figure counts the windows on the high wall, then stops to throw some snow onto one window. A male voice finally emerges and asks who's there. The little figure asks for Sergeant Troy, and a suspicious voice identifies himself as such. It's his wife, Fanny Robbin, the figure cries, as she calls his name (Frank) with emotion.

Another chapter opens with a description of the natural environment that both portrays a bucolic landscape and implies a more ominous context at the same time. We've shifted to the point of view of Fanny, although her self-identification as Troy's wife seems not to align with the rumor that she "ran away" with the soldiers.

They speak in tones which are not that of husband and wife. Fanny asks Troy to come down, and he says he's happy to see her, but cannot come out. She asks for a date—he says he doesn't quite remember promising, but that she'll have to get proper clothes before they can be married. She adds that they'll have to be published in both his parish and hers. She begins to cry, saying that he did promise, and he says if he did so they will be married. He forgot to ask permission from the officers—he's just surprised that she's come so suddenly. She apologizes for worrying him, and asks him to come see her the next day at Mrs. Twills's in North Street. He agrees and shuts the window: male voices, laughing, can be heard inside.

Throughout this passage, Fanny's earnestness contrasts with Troy's more cavalier attitude regarding their relationship. Fanny has thought of everything, prepared everything, for their wedding, whereas Troy cannot even recall having promised to get married. Still, he seems to want to appease her enough to maintain their relationship and to agree to see her the next day. The soldiers' laughs, nonetheless, imply that they, at least, think the relationship to be less than serious.

CHAPTER 12

The next day is the corn market at Casterbridge, full of burly men carrying saplings with which to poke pigs and **sheep** as they move throughout the room. Only one woman glides among them, and heads turn as she walks through. She starts with the two or three farmers she knows, but then moves on, gaining confidence to negotiate with others and show them her own sample bags. Her eyes are soft, though her face suggests defiance, determination, and savvy. She holds her own regarding prices, haggles adeptly, but her feminine elasticity softens these blows.

Bathsheba's first visit to the corn market as mistress of her uncle's farm is her first chance to establish her legitimacy as a farmer in her own right. In some ways, Bathsheba would prefer to be considered as just another of the men, without being given special consideration; in another way, however, her pride makes her take a certain pleasure in her exceptional status.

Other farmers ask who she is, and remark that it's a shame she's so headstrong, even if she does lighten up the exchange. But she's handsome and will soon be married off. Still, she looks as powerful as a queen or a sister of Jove among these men. But there's one exception among the farmers—one with full Roman features, an air of dignity and calm. Bathsheba's convinced that he's unmarried, though he is around forty years old.

Bathsheba pays attention to the attention that she is getting from the other farmers. Even if she wants to be considered like anyone else, she still has her pride slightly ruffled by the fact that one person, at least, seems immune to her appearance.

After the market, Bathsheba tells Liddy that it was as bad as being married with eyes all on her. Liddy agrees that men always are likely to ogle women. Bathsheba asks about the one good-looking man who didn't seem interested in her. Liddy exclaims that it's Farmer Boldwood, who rides past them, his eyes fixed forward. Bathsheba says he's interesting, and Liddy agrees that everyone thinks so. She says he met a bitter disappointment when young, jilted by a woman, but Bathsheba thinks that's always what people say—he's likely just reserved by nature, even if it's more romantic to think he's been treated badly. Perhaps it's somewhere between the two, she thinks.

Bathsheba continues to be torn between insistence on her own independence and authority as mistress of her own estate, and desire (stemming, again, from a pride mixed with vanity) for others to acknowledge her exceptional status. Now she learns that the one person who seemed immune to her charms was the Farmer Boldwood whose voice she had heard so recently. She and Liddy take on, here, the position of friends rather than of mistress and servant.

CHAPTER 13

On February 13, Bathsheba and Liddy are sitting by the piano, and Liddy asks Bathsheba to play the Bible and Key game, a game that predicts couples, though Bathsheba thinks it's foolish. Finally, though, she agrees to play, and as she says the verse and turns around the book, she blushes guiltily. She refuses to tell Liddy whom she imagined as a suitor. Liddy's thoughts turn to Mr. Boldwood, and says his pew is just opposite Bathsheba at church—but he never once turned to look at her, unlike everyone else.

The Bible and Key is a kind of "spin the bottle" game that involves imagining potential couples and waiting to see which one is revealed as 'true.' It's implied that Liddy's thoughts turn to the very person that had been Bathsheba's choice in the game.

After a silence, Bathsheba says she forgot about a **valentine** she'd bought for little Teddy Coggan. She writes a valentine and dips it in the envelope. Laughing, Liddy said it would be such fun to send it to old Boldwood. Bathsheba pauses, thinking that though it's silly, she's a little disconcerted that the most dignified man in the parish won't meet her eyes, and that even Liddy might remark on it. Bathsheba remarks that she doesn't care to send the valentine to Teddy, who can be so naughty. They toss the hymn book (like tossing a coin): since it lands shut, she says she'll send it to Boldwood. She sees a seal with some funny motto, though can't remember which it is: she stamps it onto the envelope, and they read, "Marry me." They send the letter off.

Here as elsewhere in the novel, Hardy mixes biblical allusions with other 'folk' traditions like valentines or, later, various superstitions held by the farm hands. Bathsheba recognizes her own sense of pride in even caring about Boldwood's apathy with respect to herself, although Liddy is also fanning the flames of this sentiment with her scheming ideas. The novel emphasizes, here, just how idle and thoughtless Bathsheba's sending of the valentine is, a lack of concern that will contrast with everything that unfolds later.

CHAPTER 14

On Valentine's Day Boldwood sits down to read his mail, and immediately sees the seal. Suddenly his quiet existence seems to distort and invite passion. Disturbed, he places the **valentine** in the corner of his mirror and goes to bed. He can't decide if it is deliberate or simply impertinent. As he tries to sleep, the moon casts strange shadows into his room.

Boldwood's disturbed state contrasts with Bathsheba's giddy thoughtlessness in sending the letter. Meanwhile, the description of the moon suggests a correspondence between Boldwood's feeling of uncertainty and natural forces beyond human control.

Suddenly, Boldwood decides to see if anything more might be in the envelope. He jumps up, but finds nothing, and reads again, "Marry me." He catches sight of his reflection in the mirror—wan with vacant, wide eyes—and chastises himself for his excitability. Towards dawn he gets up to watch the sunrise, and notices the hardened frost and icicles, as well as the footprints of birds over the snow. He hears a noise and looks at the road: it's the mailman, who hands him a letter, though it's addressed to the new shepherd at Weatherbury Farm. Boldwood realizes it's a mistake—it's for Miss Everdene's shepherd, not his. He suddenly sees Gabriel on the ridge, and says he'll take the letter to Gabriel himself—this, he thinks, is an opportunity, and he follows Gabriel as he descends towards Warren's Malthouse.

While Bathsheba has often been described at looking in the mirror contentedly, admiring her own reflection, now Boldwood stares at himself in the mirror but has a different response, one of suspicion and discomfort. Boldwood is newly attuned to the more predictable side of nature, which now contrasts with the inner conflict he's experiencing as he wonders how to react to the secret valentine and how to find out who sent it. The letter to Gabriel is his chance to invite someone else into the mystery and hopefully resolve it.

CHAPTER 15

Inside the malthouse, the maltster is eating breakfast, undeterred by his lack of teeth. Henery Fray advances to the fire, while Matthew Moon, Poorgrass, and the other farmhands arrive from the cart-horse stables. Complaining about their hard work, they order cider. The maltster asks how Bathsheba is getting along without a bailiff, and Henery says she'll regret it—there's no way she can manage herself. Everyone nods in agreement.

Another scene humorously depicts country life around the setting of the malt-house, led by the owner himself, who is almost like a building or field, an unchanging part of the landscape. Henery Fray is one of the loudest proponents of traditional gender norms, which treat women's authority with skepticism.

Moon and Poorgrass say that something bad is surely coming—they've had ominous dreams, and have seen white cats and other strange omens. Henery adds that Bathsheba is remarkably ignorant in some ways, like in cutting a rasher the wrong way. Everyone laughs, and he says that she won't listen to advice: pride and vanity will be her downfall. Just the other day she rode up to him quickly, watched him work and rode away without even greeting him.

The farm hands mix vague knowledge about Biblical stories with pagan or other superstitious beliefs, including bad omens and unlucky signs. Meanwhile, Henery continues to play on the men's stereotypes about women's inability to do "men's" work: he's especially sensitive about Bathsheba's pride and authority.

After a pause, Henery wonders what Bathsheba wants with a new piano—it seems her uncle's things weren't good enough for her. They all chime in with the new things she's bought: looking glasses, "wicked" books, and framed pictures. Meanwhile Gabriel appears in the entry, looking healthy and vigorous and carrying four **lambs** over his shoulder. Poorgrass asks about this year's lambing, and Gabriel says he and Cainy have had a hard time, especially with the harsh weather.

Now the group adds to their negative view of Bathsheba by suggesting that she's materialistic and superficial. There's a class element to such criticism: the farmers see items like looking glasses and framed pictures to have more to do with town than country life, city extravagance rather than rural simplicity.

Gabriel and the maltster talk about Norcombe, which has greatly changed since the former knew it. Then the maltster says they've been talking about the mistress—Gabriel asks sharply what they've said about her. Mark Clark says these men have been criticizing her pride and vanity, but for him her pretty face absolves her of a great deal. Gabriel sternly says he won't allow such talk about Miss Everdene. Turning to Poorgrass, he asks if he too has spoken against her, and he and Matthew Moon begin to protest uneasily. Gabriel claims that anyone who speaks against her will have him to answer to. Clark shouts, "Hear hear," interrupting the awkwardness.

Even when Mark Clark defends Bathsheba, he does so by acknowledging what to many of these men is her most positive trait—her beauty. Earlier, Gabriel has benefited from the chorus-like opinion of the malt-house circle, and the deep local knowledge that is pooled and distributed among the others, but here his feelings for Bathsheba (as well as his more progressive outlook on a woman's ability to manage a farm) invite him to rebuke such gossip.

Matthew Moon adds that Gabriel is known to be clever; for instance, he is able to tell the time by the stars and make sun-dials. Poorgrass, in contrast, used to paint Farmer James Everdene's name on his wagons and write his J and S the wrong way around. That's always been difficult for him, Poorgrass agrees.

In responding to Gabriel's rebukes, the men acknowledge that he seems to have learned to respect the laws of nature and work within them; this anecdote is another funny reminder of the rural world of the novel.

The nearly lifeless **lambs** now, revived by the fire, begin to bleat again, and Gabriel gives them milk. Henery says that before, if a lamb died before marking, the skin would belong to the shepherd; if after, then it would be the farmer's. Now Gabriel has no right at all to the skins—Poorgrass says he has a bad deal, but Gabriel protests.

This scene reminds us of Gabriel's earlier nursing of the lambs in his own small hut, as well as the way his social and economic status has shifted from the beginning of the novel to now, when he has so little to call his own.

Boldwood enters the malthouse, and gives Gabriel a letter. He reads it: it's from Fanny, who encloses the money she owes him, and says she's happy to say she will soon be married to her young man, Sergeant Troy, now quartered in Melchester. She asks him to keep this letter secret, before they can come to Weatherbury as husband and wife, and thanks him again for his kindness.

Fanny Robbin, we now learn for certain, was the poor woman that Gabriel met on his way to the farm. Now he can link the figure of a desperate woman whom he encountered with the story of a runaway servant that has been the talk of the village.

Gabriel shows the letter to Boldwood, who is dismayed. Boldwood says Troy is clever, the son of a medical man who left the country in debt. He cries that Fanny is a silly girl—she's lost her character, since Troy will never marry her.

Gabriel is more discreet than the others, but Boldwood has a reason to learn news of Fanny. They both realize that for a precarious woman, this letter doesn't bode well.

Cain Ball bursts in to say the ewes need Gabriel. He jumps up, marks the infant **sheep** with "B.E.", then leaves with Cain. Boldwood leaves with him, and as they approach the field he draws Bathsheba's letter, and asks if Gabriel knows the handwriting. Blushing, Gabriel identifies it, as he realizes with discomfort that the letter must be anonymous. Mistaking his confusion, Boldwood protests that the "fun" lies in trying to identify the sender of a **valentine**, though he says "fun" like "torture." Returning home, he contemplates this new information.

Boldwood has used the opportunity of the letter to Gabriel in order to learn about something more directly relevant to himself—the author of the anonymous letter that he's received. Although Boldwood tries to treat the valentine casually, he's clearly even more disturbed by learning that Bathsheba was the one who sent it.

CHAPTER 16

A group of parishioners (mostly women and girls) is just about to leave All Saints' church after a service when a young cavalry soldier enters the church. The officiating curate whispers with the soldier, and then the clerk and his wife join them. Believing that there is going to be a wedding, most of the women sit back down. The clocktower strikes half-past 11. The women begin to whisper among themselves, wondering where the bride is, while the soldier waits stoically. At a quarter to 12, the clock rings again, and the women nervously giggle. When it strikes 12, no one makes a sound.

Here, the church setting is undercut by the fact that the women are laughing and gossiping among themselves. Their reaction could also be read as a stereotypical portrayal of how women behave. The soldier, meanwhile, stands out as mysterious and even glamorous against the rural church setting, which adds to the intrigue in this passage.

Finally, the young soldier gives up on waiting and leaves the church. But when he reaches the square, he runs into a woman who looks anxious and then afraid upon seeing the expression on his face. She tells the man, Frank, that she made a mistake and had been waiting for him at the wrong church—All Souls' instead of All Saints'. She wasn't too worried because she figured they could get married tomorrow instead, but Frank replies that he doesn't want to go through this experience again any time soon. The woman tries to convince him that her mistake wasn't so awful, but he tells her that "God knows" when they'll get married and then rushes away.

Given that the man is named Frank, the reader can infer that he is Sergeant Troy, and that the woman is Fanny Robin. Whereas Fanny is harshly scrutinized, Troy feels confident to act as he pleases, which emphasizes the imbalanced power dynamic between them.

CHAPTER 17

On Saturday in the market, Boldwood really looks at Bathsheba for the first time. He's long considered women as remote phenomena more than real beings. Now he notices her face and profile, her figure and skirt. He thinks she's beautiful, but still unsure, asks his neighbor if she's considered handsome—he says yes, heartily. How could she have written 'marry me'? he asks himself, just as blind in his way as Bathsheba was in failing to imagine how great issues can stem from small beginnings.

Boldwood was the only man who had paid little attention to Bathsheba before: now the idea of paying close attention to a woman is so new to him that he has to rely on others in order to make his judgments about her beauty. The narrator makes another connection between Boldwood and Bathsheba, only to emphasize again the great gulf between their characters.

Watching Bathsheba negotiate with a farmer, Boldwood suddenly becomes hotly jealous. Bathsheba realizes Boldwood is finally staring at her, and feels triumphant, though she feels sorry that she had to bring this out with such artifice. She decides to ask for his forgiveness when they next meet.

The letter has begun to work its magic, and Bathsheba, realizing this, has mixed feelings—she hasn't lost her pride, but recognizes (as she did when running after Gabriel) that she may have erred.

CHAPTER 18

Boldwood owns Lower Farm, as close to aristocracy as possible here in Weatherbury, and the one place where it's possible to see good society. His house is a step back from the road, and Boldwood is pacing in his stables, meditating. While Gabriel has the mediocrity of inadequacy, the narrator says, Boldwood has the mediocrity of counterpoise, that is, his calm stems from being in perfect balance between antagonistic forces. Now that he's thrown off, he's subject to extremes, though Bathsheba would never be able to imagine such intensity coming from him.

The narrator compares Bathsheba's first two suitors to each other, unafraid to portray them frankly in all their faults. Both men are rather average—indeed, the beginning of the book had chronicled Gabriel's "mediocrity" at length. While a tragedy changed Gabriel, what begins to alter Boldwood's character is an event prompted by Bathsheba herself.

Boldwood comes to the stable door and looks towards Bathsheba's farm, seeing her, Gabriel, and Cainy Ball. Seeing Bathsheba lights him up, and he resolves to go speak to her. As he approaches, Bathsheba looks up from the **lambs** that they are treating, and Gabriel too turns to look at him. Gabriel immediately suspects Bathsheba of some kind of flirtation. Suddenly uncertain, Boldwood realizes he has no way of judging a woman's behavior, and decides to continue on down the road as if he hadn't meant to join them. Bathsheba, meanwhile, recognizes that it's because of her that he's come, and is troubled that although she hasn't been scheming for marriage, her actions have indeed been those of a flirt.

Boldwood is in some ways on an equal footing with Bathsheba, as both of them manage neighboring farms. Here, though, Boldwood doesn't feel able to meet Bathsheba as an equal, given his uncertainty regarding love and courtship. Bathsheba, meanwhile, begins to better understand the full implications of her careless action, especially since she knows she prefers her independence and doesn't want to get married at all.

CHAPTER 19

Finally Boldwood does call on Bathsheba, but she isn't at home—he's forgotten that she is mistress of an estate. Indeed, he has idealized her. But by now the wild extremes of his love have settled into a persistent, manageable feeling. He goes to see her at the sheepwashing pool, where Gabriel, Coggan, Moon, Poorgrass and Cain Ball are assembled. Bathsheba stands by them in a new riding habit, while the men push the **sheep** into the pool.

Like Gabriel, Boldwood is wont to idealize Bathsheba—which means, here, "forgetting" about her non-traditional authority position. At the sheepwashing, nonetheless, Bathsheba reigns naturally over a number of men, who seem to accept her authority over them.

Boldwood comes up and says hello to Bathsheba, who finds him severe and serious, and tries to withdraw. Boldwood, though, pursues her. Simply and solemnly, he says he's come to make her an offer of marriage. Bathsheba tries to stay entirely neutral, as he says he was a confirmed bachelor, but has changed upon seeing her. She stammers that while she respects him, but cannot imagine accepting his offer. Now abandoning his solemn dignity, Boldwood exclaims in a low voice that he loves her and wants her as his wife, even if he lacks the gracefulness to flatter her. He wouldn't have spoken if he hadn't been led to hope—and she realizes that it's the **valentine**.

Bathsheba had been satisfied with Boldwood merely noticing her—she didn't expect, and didn't really consider the possibility, that such attention wouldn't stop there. Now Bathsheba faces her second offer of marriage, and second vow of love. She initially admired Boldwood's dignity, but has now been the cause of his loss of dignity, as he stoops to begging her to marry him. Bathsheba recognizes that this is all in many ways the fault of her own vanity.

Bathsheba stammers that she never should have sent the **valentine**, as it was thoughtless. Boldwood exclaims that it was not thoughtlessness, but rather the beginnings of her feelings for him. Bathsheba says she hasn't fallen in love with him. Boldwood continues to try to convince her, listing all she'll have as his wife. Feeling great sympathy for this man's simplicity, she protests and asks him to let the matter rest. Finally, she agrees to think for awhile, and asks him to let her be while she does so.

While Bathsheba tries to clarify her actual reasons for sending the valentine, Boldwood cannot imagine that anyone could be so thoughtless, especially because his character is so unlike that. Bathsheba is not cold or unfeeling—she does feel sympathy and pity—and those feelings prompt her to agree to consider the proposal despite her lack of love for the man.

CHAPTER 20

Bathsheba muses that Boldwood is so kind to offer her everything she could want. Many women in her situation, indeed, would have jumped to accept such an offer: he is of sufficient standing, good character, respected and esteemed. But she doesn't love him, and the novelty of her position as farmer has still not worn off. Nonetheless, she feels uneasy, realizing that she had started the game and should accept the consequences. Though she is impulsive, she also has a deliberative spirit, and now both are at odds.

Bathsheba recognizes that although she has independence and a self-sufficient status now, without a husband she is still, in this society, more precarious, not to mention outside social norms. Bathsheba's independence battles with her pride, her moral sense, and also a romantic strain in her character.

The next day Bathsheba finds Gabriel grinding his sheers with Cainy Ball. She asks to speak with Gabriel alone. She asks him if people remarked on her private discussion with Boldwood yesterday: he says they did, but didn't think it odd—they imagined the two would be soon married. Bathsheba scoffs at that idea: Gabriel looks incredulous, sad, but also relieved. Gabriel could give an opinion on what she's done, he says, but she says she doesn't want it. Bitterly, Gabriel turns back to his work. Bathsheba does, then, ask what he thinks. He responds that it's unworthy of a woman as thoughtful and comely as she. She blushes scarlet, and he says while he's been rude, he thinks it will do her good. She replies sarcastically, losing her temper, and breaking out that he probably thinks she's unworthy in not marrying him. He's long ago ceased thinking of that, he says quietly, and when she adds, 'or wishing it,' he agrees.

Although Bathsheba didn't accept Gabriel's offer of marriage, they share a history together and a longer relationship than any she has forged on the farm—she respects his character and considers him a friend and confidant. But this exchange underlines the awkward gap between the two: Bathsheba wants Gabriel's advice and opinion, but she is still the mistress, while he is her employee, so she holds a certain power over him. At the same time, she likes to think that Gabriel still loves her, and her pride hurts to imagine that he no longer cares about her—even if she doesn't want to marry him herself.

Gabriel adds that Bathsheba is to blame for playing pranks on a man like Boldwood. She cries that she won't allow any man to criticize her private conduct, and she orders him to leave the farm at the end of the week. He acquiesces, taking his shears and leaving her, like Moses left the Pharaoh.

The disconnect between the social and economic positions of Bathsheba and Gabriel becomes tragically clear here, as Bathsheba is able to not only neglect his opinion but punish him for it.

CHAPTER 21

On Sunday afternoon a number of men run up to the house and tell Bathsheba that 60 or 70 **sheep** have broken the fence and gotten into a field of clover: if they aren't pierced on the side, they'll all die. They're all talking at once, and Bathsheba, who's still uneasy from her talk with Gabriel, cries for them to be quiet, and with dark, shining eyes, orders them out to the sheep. They are lying down, many foaming at the mouth, and are lifted up and brought into the next field. Laban Tall says they can only be cured through the piercing, but if it's an inch too far left or right they'll die anyway. Only Gabriel knows how to do this, Poorgrass says, though Bathsheba orders them not to refer to him in her presence. She orders them to get someone to cure the sheep at once.

Another tragedy involving farm livestock arrives, recalling the tragedy of Gabriel's dead sheep—though this time there's still a chance to save the animals (and, with them, the substantial financial investment they represent). Once again, amid the disorder and disorganization of the farm hands, Gabriel emerges as a potential calming, authoritative figure that could solve the crisis (just as he took charge during a fire). Bathsheba's pride, though, makes her reluctant to call upon the man she just sent away.

The first **sheep** dies, and Bathsheba grows increasingly agitated. Little by little, her conviction not to call Gabriel wanes. Finally, she asks Laban where he's staying, and orders him to fetch Gabriel and return back. She waits for him anxiously, but soon Laban returns and says she must come civilly and ask him properly for him to return. Another sheep falls dead, and, her eyes full of tears of pride, she begins to cry. She writes a note, saying, "Do not desert me, Gabriel!" and reddens and she refolds it.

Bathsheba's pride continues to clash with her distress and her recognition that Gabriel may be the only one to avert this natural crisis. Gabriel too, nonetheless, has some pride of his own; Bathsheba is forced to beg him, just as he once begged her, in order to succeed in convincing him to return to the farm and save the sheep.

15 minutes later, Gabriel returns. He looks at her, and Bathsheba, her eyes full of gratitude, still chastises him for his unkindness. He murmurs confusedly, and hastens onto the **sheep**. He manages to recover 57. Only four die. When he's done, Bathsheba asks with a smile if he'll stay on: he agrees.

Bathsheba may feel chastened, her pride laid low, but she's unable to fully rid herself of such pride, instead maintaining it outwardly while relying on her charm to get what she wants.

CHAPTER 22

For the first time since his great misfortune, Gabriel feels independent and happier, though he remains attached to Bathsheba. It's June 1st and still sheep-shearing season: the landscape is green and full of ferns and blooming plants. Coggan, Fray, Laban Tall, Poorgrass, Cain, and Gabriel are all in the Shearing Barn. Like a church or castle, this barn is still used for the purpose for which it was built. A sense of continuity and history (four centuries) pervades it, and its creed continues to be valid.

Gabriel has learned a great deal from suffering from forces outside his control: having been rendered penniless, he's now managed to climb his way back up to an economic position of greater stability. The shearing barn is another example of the relative stability and continuity of Wessex, which seems to remain untouched by modernization.

The shearers kneel by the open side doors over a panting captive **sheep**. It's a picture of today in a 400-year-old frame: Weatherbury is unchangeable compared to cities, where a period of ten or twenty years counts as old. The shearers, then, are in harmony with their shelter. In the background, Mary-ann Money and Temperance and Soberness Miller are twisting the fleeces into wool. Behind them all is Bathsheba, watching carefully.

The changing circumstances of the villagers and the dramatic events that take place within Weatherbury coexist, and contrast, with the unchanging elements of the landscape and the area. This scene is calm and bucolic, but that tranquility is also a trap that prevents one from seeing the conflicts within such stability.

Bathsheba watches Gabriel lop off the fleece of a **sheep** and, seeing its flush, murmurs that the sheep is blushing at the insult. Gabriel is silently content that Bathsheba is watching him, but not overly so—he doesn't even wish to talk to her. Bathsheba's chatter, though, says nothing; Gabriel's silence says more.

Bathsheba and Gabriel are developing a close friendship even if their relationship is inevitably marred both by their common history and by the social gulf that now divides them.

Gabriel calls for Cainy, who runs forward with the tar-pot to stamp "B.E." onto the shorn skin. Mary-ann carries the fleece back, 3 ½ pounds of warmth for unknown people far away, though they'll never feel the comfort of the pure, new wool here.

We're reminded, here, that the country may be simpler and more static than the city, but is often a source of urban comfort, which requires hard labor and close attention.

But Gabriel's contentment is interrupted by the appearance of Farmer Boldwood, who crosses towards Bathsheba. They speak in low tones, inaudible to Gabriel, though he imagines it's not about the **sheep**. Embarrassed, Bathsheba looks at the ground, growing redder and redder. Sadly, Gabriel continues to work.

Here we see this scene from Gabriel's rather than Bathsheba's point of view. Through his ability to closely analyze everything around him, as well as his familiarity with Bathsheba's character, he is able to see and judge the nature of this courtship.

Bathsheba leaves Boldwood and then reappears 15 minutes later in a new riding habit: she and Boldwood ride off. As Gabriel watches them, he accidentally snips the **sheep** in the groin: Bathsheba notices the blood, and reprimands Gabriel for his carelessness. Gabriel knows Bathsheba is aware that she's the cause of it, but he steels himself in resolve and says nothing. Bathsheba says she's going to see Boldwood's Leicesters (a sheep breed) and tells Gabriel to keep a watch over everything while she's gone.

Gabriel is usually able to recede into the background so that his own observing goes unnoticed, but here his evident interest in Bathsheba's and Boldwood's affairs catches him out. Gabriel also recognizes that Bathsheba's pride prevents her from acknowledging her influence over him, even though she can sometimes invite such influence.

Temperance Miller, Coggan, and Laban Tall conclude that this means marriage. Henery Fray says that such a bold lady with her own home has no need for a husband. Fray often objects to such determined women as Bathsheba: now he remarks that he once gave her advice, and she couldn't care less. He even thinks Boldwood probably kissed her at the sheep-washing the other day. Gabriel says that's false, but Fray insists that he can see where others can't.

The group of farm hands is never wary of paying close attention to other people's affairs, especially when it concerns their mistress Bathsheba. Fray in particular is once again the most traditional and most vehemently opposed to a woman's independence and authority over him.

Mary-ann, who in her brown complexion looks like a Nicholas Poussin sketch, asks the party if anyone knows of a second-hand fellow who might like her. Gabriel remains silent, however: his good mood has gone away. Bathsheba had hinted she might give him the post of bailiff. Now he realizes he was mistaken in lecturing her: he had thought she was trifling with Boldwood, but really she was trifling with him.

The narrator elevates Mary-ann to the status of a world-famous painter, before juxtaposing that characterization awkwardly with her sighs about her comparatively dismal love life. Gabriel doesn't chatter like the others, but Bathsheba has wounded him as well.

CHAPTER 23

The night of the shearing supper, Bathsheba sits by the table, flushed and eyes sparkling. Boldwood appears at the gate and Bathsheba asks him to take Gabriel's spot: Gabriel moves readily. After supper Coggan sings a love song, followed by Poorgrass. A young Coggan son is beset by giggle and is sent home for his bad manners: the others take over the singing. As the sun sets, the company talks merrily, while Bathsheba remains by the window knitting.

Bathsheba seems not to know or perhaps, just now, not to care about the fact that her private life is a matter of public discussion—Coggan and Poorgrass don't hesitate to imply what they know by taking up love songs, while Bathsheba is content to watch over them without participating.

Gabriel notices that Boldwood has gone. His thoughts are interrupted by Bathsheba asking for his flute, since she's been asked to sing herself. Just then Boldwood comes back inside, and joins her higher voice with his bass, singing verse about a soldier with a "winning tongue" seeking his bride. A buzz of pleasure greets the end. Pennyways has showed up uninvited, and Coggan and Poorgrass begin to berate him for stealing. Their talk masks a dramatic scene in the parlor, where Bathsheba and Boldwood are alone.

Boldwood's dramatic re-entrance underlines even more to everyone present that there is a courtship taking place between him and Bathsheba. The choice of the song and the romantic duet create even more of a romantic atmosphere—one that is nevertheless deflated by the petty squabbles between Coggan, Poorgrass, and the bailiff.

Bathsheba says, trembling, that she will try to love Boldwood, and will marry him if she can believe that she'll be a good wife. But she'd like him to wait a few more weeks: she cannot promise yet. Joyfully, Boldwood agrees and wishes her goodnight. She's still struggling to make amends, but still uncertain as to whether she must do so by marrying him.

Bathsheba is again torn between different feelings, and instead of either accepting or refusing Boldwood, puts him off once again. Bathsheba is still trying to instruct herself in the laws of penance, while retaining an independent streak.

CHAPTER 24

Bathsheba is preparing to close the farm before going to bed. Gabriel usually precedes her and watches her, though she doesn't know it: women, the narrator says, complain about men's fickleness in love, though they snub his constancy.

Our narrator's periodic intrusions underline the somewhat skeptical view of women that pervades the book, even as it portrays a woman who manages a farm successfully.

After inspecting the buildings, Bathsheba goes to the farm paddock, peering at the Devon cows inside. She goes back through a plantation of firs, an area that is gloomy and dark whatever the time of day. Suddenly Bathsheba thinks she hears footsteps. Slightly disconcerted, she pauses as the noise approaches: a figure brushes past her and something hitches on her skirt; she falls. A male voice asks if he's hurt her, and cries that they're somehow stuck together. He asks to use her lantern, and opens its door.

Much of Bathsheba's work is solitary; she does have a companion in Liddy, but no one who is both a woman and a member of her own social station, which can be isolating. Nonetheless, Bathsheba is usually comfortable in the space of her own farm; this chance meeting—another reminder of the strange laws of circumstance—is an exception.

In the light Bathsheba can see that the man is a soldier, nothing like the sinister figure she'd momentarily feared. He offers to unfasten her, but she hastens to do it. She lifts her eyes and sees him gazing at her. Finally he offers to cut her dress, since she can't manage. He brushes her hand as he does so, which annoys Bathsheba. He thanks her for the sight of a beautiful face: with dignity and indignation, she says she didn't willingly show it. He continues to tease her, and she chastises him for his rudeness.

Bathsheba's first meeting with the man who will turn out to be her third suitor is just as awkward and uncomfortable as some of her other encounters with other men. This time, though, the man is more gallant and flirtatious than the country farmers whom Bathsheba is used to: his manner puts her out of sorts.

The soldier manages to cut the dress, and bows as he apologizes to the "charming" lady, more beautiful than any woman he's ever seen. Bathsheba asks who he is: his name is Sergeant Troy, and he's lodging here. After he teases her more, Bathsheba stands up so as to get away from him, he bids goodbye to her, calling her "Beauty."

Part of the peculiarity and forwardness of the man's manner comes, we now learn, from his different social station: as a soldier he may not be wealthier than farmers, but he's acquainted with more sophisticated town life.

Bathsheba rushes inside and asks Liddy if any gentleman-looking soldier is staying in the village. It might be Sergeant Troy on furlough, she thinks. Bathsheba asks what kind of person he is: Liddy says he's a ruin to honest girls, as some say, but she thinks he's quick, trim, and clever—a doctor's son and well-educated, though he wasted it by enlisting.

Liddy again serves as a female counterpart to the men at the malt-house: she catches Bathsheba up on the local gossip and general opinion. Here, though, her opinion is affected by her own soft spot for Sergeant Troy.

Bathsheba, nonetheless, isn't entirely offended: women like her can put up with unconventional behavior when it involves being praised or, sometimes, mastered, the narrator says. She can't decide whether or not he insulted her. But Boldwood, all the same, had never told her she was beautiful.

Bathsheba is unsettled by the encounter, and just as she's been morally divided regarding Boldwood, now she's internally conflicted about this man, who knew just how to flatter her.

CHAPTER 25

Sergeant Troy lives without much thought for the past or future, beyond yesterday or tomorrow. He, is then, largely content, never disappointed as a result of expectations. He is truthful to men but a liar to women, which helps win him popularity in society. Though he has vices, none is horrible, so people's disapproval usually comes with a smile. While he's always active, he never has one particular direction. He speaks well as a result of his good education, and is able to speak of one thing while thinking of another—of dinner while flattering a woman, for instance. He believes one must other flatter women or curse and swear at them: no middle way.

The narrator gives us a character sketch of Bathsheba's final suitor, as he did for Gabriel and for Boldwood. Troy may seem like a mere trickster, cheerful and benign, but his lack of integrity—the ease at which he switches from truth to lie and manipulates people to his advantage—suggests that there is a greater danger and potential conflict lying beneath his smooth surface, even if general opinion can't perceive that.

A week or two after the shearing, Bathsheba is at her hayfields watching Coggan and Clark mowing when she sees Troy appear in the distance. He has come to help in the hay-making just out of pleasure. When he enters the field he sees her and walks toward her: Bathsheba flushes in embarrassment.

Bathsheba is in her regular position of caretaker and figure of authority, but her sense of cool confidence is ruffled by the man who knew so well how to unsettle and flatter her.

CHAPTER 26

Nodding his hat, Troy says he never imagined it was the farm's mistress he had met the other night, the "Queen of the Corn-market," as he's heard. She indifferently thanks him for his help, but, looking hurt, he says there's no need. He remarks that it's a shame bad luck should plague a man for telling a woman she's beautiful. She still would rather he leave, but he claims he'd rather her curses than another woman's kisses. Bathsheba is left speechless.

Troy is clever and overly charming, but it's implied here that he may be earnestly seeking Bathsheba's attention, just as Bathsheba feigned indifference while inviting the attention of Boldwood. Troy's bold language leaves Bathsheba stunned since she can't fit him into her existing understanding of the world and of men.

Bathsheba simply says, turning away, that she can't allow strangers to be bold and impudent even in praise—he should have said nothing. Much of the pleasure of a feeling, he replies, lies in being able to express a feeling on the spur of a moment. She says she hopes such strength extends to morals and religion, and Troy continues to joke and tease, while she tries to hide a smile. He asks for her forgiveness and she doesn't accept it. As he continues, she cries he's too profane, caught between distress and enjoyment. He says she surely must have heard what everyone thinks of her beauty: at first she demurs, then hesitatingly begins to agree.

Bathsheba continues to insist on proper behavior and morality, even though that's not exactly in her nature—indeed, in some ways she and Troy are similar in their willingness to buck convention. As a woman, though, Bathsheba has to give greater care to her own behavior. But Troy manages to play to her vanity enough to make her even agree that other people have found her beautiful—and that she's noticed it.

Troy cries that the truth has come out, but he says her beauty will do more harm than good, since it makes all men unable to be content with an ordinary woman. He asks if she reads French, then mentions a proverb that translates, "he chastens that loves well." Bathsheba remarks at his rhetorical skill, but insists that she derives no pleasure from it: he says he isn't so conceited as to think so. Still, he hopes she won't judge his "uncontrolled tongue" too harshly. She says she hopes he won't speak that way again. He says he's leaving in a month to return to drill, so she's taking away the small amount of pleasure he has.

Troy continues to flatter Bathsheba, relying on his cleverness and quick wit—even if it is almost entirely smoke and mirrors—to charm Bathsheba into getting her to be more and more attracted to him. Bathsheba can play this game as well; again, she has developed a flirtatious attitude that's not too far from Troy's, but here his greater sophistication conquers her less developed savviness.

Distracted, Bathsheba wonders what time it is: he looks at his **watch**, then cries that she should have his gold watch as a gift. Troy presses it into her hands, saying it was his father's. She cries in wonder that she can't accept it, but he retreats to avoid being handed it. Bathsheba pursues him in distress. He cries that he loves her even more than he loved his father, now in earnest: he had praised her beauty in jest, but his phrases have now moved him to greater sincerity. Bewildered, Bathsheba insists that his generosity is too great. She's now excited, wild, and more beautiful than ever, and Troy is stunned that he ever joked about it. Finally, he agrees to take it back, as long as she agrees to speak with him while he stays there. Left alone, Bathsheba heart beats as she wonders how much of all this was true.

Bathsheba is both pleased and uncomfortable at Troy's advances, but as she attempts to extract herself, Troy impulsively makes a hugely generous gift—one that underlines his impulsive nature in general, as well as the fact that many of his words seem not thought through. Now, though, Troy is somewhere between jesting and earnestness—he may have taken his joking too far, as he too suddenly falls under the spell of Bathsheba's beauty and allure. Bathsheba, meanwhile, has lost her cool reasonableness entirely.

CHAPTER 27

It's late June now, and Bathsheba is watching the Weatherbury bees swarming in a haze. Since all the others are engaged with the hay, Bathsheba has decided to hive these herself. As she prepares, Troy walks through the gate and declares he'll help her. She says he must put on a veil and gloves: he tells her to transfer her outfit to himself, and she laughs once she sees him in it. He holds up the hive, shaking the bees from it, then says it makes one's arm ache more than the sword-exercise.

Once again Troy interrupts Bathsheba as she's in charge of another affair at the farm in order to show off to her. Troy also, nonetheless, is savvier than Boldwood or Gabriel—he knows not to come on too strong to Bathsheba, much less propose right away, and instead charms her little by little over time so that her feelings for him continue to develop.

Bathsheba says she's never seen the sword-exercise, and after pausing she says she'd like to. Troy bends over and whispers a suggestion in a low voice: Bathsheba blushes and says she couldn't—only, perhaps, if she brings Liddy. Troy looks coldly away and says there's no reason to bring her. Bathsheba agrees to come alone, only for a short time.

Bathsheba has overcome her shyness and discomfort and is now increasingly confident enough to be as bold and flirtatious as Troy is to her, even if she still feels required to at least gesture towards standards for a virtuous woman.

CHAPTER 28

At eight in the evening, Bathsheba arrives at an uncultivated hollow among ferns, before turning around and going back home. Then, thinking of Troy's disappointment, she turns around again and runs back: he's waiting for her. Troy draws a sword and begins to thrust, explaining what he's doing. He proposes that they act as if they're fighting: he'll miss her by a hair's breadth each time. He slices the air, and she cries out, but he tells her not to be afraid.

Bathsheba continues to be conflicted. This conflict is no longer between paying penance to Boldwood or maintaining her independence; now it is between maintaining her female virtue—a quality insisted on at the time the novel was written—and caving in to her own desires.

Troy is an excellent marksman, and he dazzles Bathsheba, especially when he cuts off just one lock of her hair. He points to a caterpillar resting on the front of her bodice, and in a flash flicks it off with his sword. He puts his weapon away, saying she was within a hair's breadth of danger, though he never would have let anything happen to her. He stoops and picks up the lock of her hair and puts it in his coat pocket. He draws nearer, saying he must leave: he kisses her, then darts away, leaving her in tears.

This entire stunt has allowed Troy to show off in front of Bathsheba and play the part of the soldier saving a woman in distress. While the novel wants us to see some of the bluster of Troy's position, Bathsheba is blind to it—she fully succumbs to Troy's flattery and flirtatiousness. The portrayal of a kiss before marriage would have been shocking to many Victorian readers.

CHAPTER 29

Bathsheba now loves Troy in the way that self-reliant women do when they lose their self-reliance, making them weaker than anyone. Though she is a woman of the world, she still knows little of society or of self-indulgence: her love is like a child's. But she makes no effort to control her own feelings, and is happily unaware of Troy's own faults, unlike Gabriel's, whose faults are all for the showing.

Although Bathsheba has always been characterized as independent and self-sufficient, here the novel shows how such character traits can be malleable. While Gabriel isn't portrayed as perfect either, we are meant to see his more apparent faults as better than Troy's two-sidedness.

Gabriel recognizes this love and it pains him. He decides to speak to Bathsheba, using her treatment of Boldwood as excuse. He finds her one day walking through the corn fields. He awkwardly brings up Boldwood so that he can mention the wedding likely to take place between them, so people say. She hotly denies that this is the case. Abandoning pretense, Gabriel says he has obviously been courting her.

Gabriel has kept quiet while watching Bathsheba make what he believes are moral errors, but now he believes that she's gone too far, and is willing to risk breaching the social gulf that has cropped up between him and Bathsheba, though it's because he still has feelings for her.

Bathsheba insists that she must clear up any mistake. She didn't promise Boldwood anything: she respects but has never loved him, and as soon as he returns from traveling her answer to him will be no. Now sighing, Gabriel says he wishes she'd never met Sergeant Troy. She stonily says that he's educated, well-born, and worthy of a woman: besides, she can't see what this has to do with their conversation. But Gabriel begs her not to trust him: he doesn't like him, and asks her to consider being more cool towards him. Red and angry, Bathsheba stammers that he has no right to say such things. Troy's goodness is just hidden—he goes in privately by the old tower door at church, she says, so no one sees him. Gabriel is incredulous, and sad to see how much she trusts Troy. He declares that he knows she's lost to himself, but only begs her to be more discreet towards him, and to consider how safe she would be in his hands.

This scene between Bathsheba and Gabriel is notably similar to another scene between them, when Bathsheba had asked Gabriel for his opinion regarding Boldwood and she had flared up at him. Now, once again, Bathsheba changes in a flash from friend to mistress and back again, depending on whether or not Gabriel says something she wants to hear. At one level, then, Bathsheba seems to understand that she may be making a mistake with Troy; yet she insists on painting him as a grand, even noble figure, creating her own reality so that she can best defend her own actions.

Pale, Bathsheba tells him to leave the farm. Gabriel calmly says this is the second time she's pretended to dismiss him. He can't go unless she hires a bailiff: if he leaves it will go to ruin, since it'll only be led by a woman. He may be interfering, but will remain grimly faithful. Privately, Bathsheba is grateful for this, and she asks for him to leave her alone, but as a woman, not a mistress. He stands still and allows her to get ahead of him, but then sees a figure arise in the distance—Troy's. Gabriel turns back and goes home by the church-yard. He climbs to the tower door, which clearly hasn't been used in years.

Again, Gabriel angers Bathsheba so much that she retakes her position of authority over him in order to banish him. But this time Gabriel holds his own. In one way this is a blatant disruption of authority, and one that suggests that Gabriel, too, is skeptical of a woman's role in charge of a farm; but the novel also portrays his declaration as a noble sign of faithfulness to Bathsheba.

CHAPTER 30

30 minutes later Bathsheba arrives home. Troy has just said goodbye for two days, since he'll be visiting friends in Bath, and has kissed her again. He had in fact only hinted that he would meet her there—she had forbidden it, but was worried that he'd come anyway, which was why she so wanted to get rid of Gabriel. She sits then jumps back up, writing a final letter of refusal to Boldwood. To calm her uneasiness, she decides to take it to one of the servant women now, though it won't be sent until the morning.

Even while Bathsheba defends Troy to Gabriel and insists on his goodness, she recognizes that their relationship is, at least as it stands, not exactly a paragon of virtue according to the standards of society. She tries to appease her conscience by breaking things off for good with Boldwood, convincing herself that she doesn't owe him anything.

In the kitchen Liddy, Temperance, and Mary-ann are speaking of Troy and Bathsheba: she bursts in and asks who they're speaking of. After a pause Liddy tells her: she forbids them to gossip, saying she doesn't care at all for him. Mary-ann says he's a wild scamp and she's right to hate him. Bathsheba, now in a temper, disagrees violently, but then claims again that she doesn't care for him. She bursts into tears.

Bathsheba has largely kept a cool, controlled demeanor, but here she breaks out in a temper. Earlier she had invited the looks and attention of others, but now she recognizes how overwhelming and unpleasant such gossip can be, preventing her from being as independent as she'd like.

Alone with Liddy in the parlor, Bathsheba admits that she does in fact love Troy—she has to tell someone. She sends Liddy away, then beckons her back and asks her to swear that he's not a bad man. She begins to say that she cannot, but Bathsheba berates her for listening to others. She paces back and forth, yelling at Liddy, who begins to cry too. Bathsheba says that love is only misery for women, and curses her fate for being one. Then she wheels around and orders Liddy never to repeat what she's heard. Liddy agrees with dignity, but she does say she doesn't deserve to be yelled at for nothing. Bathsheba says she's a companion, not just a servant, so she should pay her no mind. She continues to feel sorry for herself, until Liddy cries that she'll never leave her, and will never tell anyone what Bathsheba said. She adds that Bathsheba would be a match for any man in one of those moves. She wishes she herself had such a good protection against danger, even if it is a failing.

Just as in her relationship with Gabriel, here Bathsheba is torn between considering Liddy a true friend and confidant, and a servant who remains firmly beneath Bathsheba in terms of authority. She switches between the two whenever it best suits her. Liddy, though, has some independent spirit of her own, and objects to being treated as a mere vessel for Bathsheba's anger. In some ways, both these women suffer equally from the expectations and greater scrutiny to which society subjects them, even as Bathsheba enjoys far greater privilege than Liddy does. Ultimately, Liddy does decide that loyalty to her mistress (and fellow woman) is more important to her than Bathsheba's wild and sometimes unfair moods.

CHAPTER 31

To avoid Boldwood upon his return, Bathsheba decides to visit Liddy at her sister's, as the girl has been granted a week's holiday to spend there. She's walked three miles when suddenly she sees Boldwood over the hill. He doesn't look up until they're almost face to face. Bathsheba falters and blushes, and he asks if she's afraid of him—her demeanor so contrasts with his own feelings. He's accepted that she won't marry him, he says. Confusedly, Bathsheba bids him goodbye, but as she withdraws, he asks heavily if it's really final: he asks her for pity, though he's ashamed to beg her not to throw him off. She says that's impossible, since she never had him, though he reminds her of her encouragement. That was a childish game of which she now repents, Bathsheba says.

Bathsheba hasn't quite reached the maturity of dealing with the consequences of her actions directly, rather than obliquely; now, though, she's forced to confront the man whom she knows she hasn't treated fairly—even if Boldwood too has been overly insistent on having Bathsheba marry him despite her evident feelings. Boldwood too has a sense of pride, though more than Bathsheba he is willing to undercut it. Once again Bathsheba has to pay the price for the thoughtless game she played—a game from which Liddy, too, was not exempt.

Boldwood regrets how her jest has now turned to earnestness, and he bemoans how much torture that trick has caused him—she's the only love he's ever had. He asks her not to pity him, though again asks what happened to her conviction that she would grow to care for him. Bathsheba repeats that she never promised him anything, and asks him to think more kindly of her, and to forgive her. Still, he claims she must be heartless, though he wavers between renouncing her and begging her to change her mind.

Boldwood seems to want to recapture his pride and insist on his self-sufficiency and independence from Bathsheba, but his feelings for her continually thwart such an attempt, as he tries to get Bathsheba to change her mind. For Bathsheba his stubbornness is yet another price she has to pay, preventing the end of the painful conflict.

Bathsheba repeats that she's colder than he thinks, a result of an unprotected childhood in a cold world: resentfully, Boldwood says that's no reason—she does have the ability to love, and he knows where it's turned. He begins to rage about Troy, who stole her in Boldwood's absence: now people laugh at him. He has no further claim on her, Boldwood says, though he's ashamed. This is all woman's folly, he adds, but she replies that it's unmanly to attack a woman this way: there's no one who can fight her battles for her. But she won't care if everyone sneers at her. He dares her to deny that Troy has kissed her, and she cannot. Boldwood curses him, while Bathsheba asks him not to, as she loves Troy: but Boldwood continues to rage, telling her to keep Troy away from him. He turns his face and leaves her.

Bathsheba attempts to explain herself to Boldwood by describing how she was raised, alone with her aunt on a country farm, where she had to learn how to manage affairs herself independently of men. But Boldwood is able to see that this is no more than an excuse—he recognizes that, while he's been gone, Bathsheba has in fact changed from her cool and unpassionate character thanks to the flirtations of Troy. Still, Bathsheba feels attacked once again, held to a higher standard because of her sex, even while she's unable to defend herself like a man could.

Bathsheba knows that Troy is about to return to Weatherbury, and fears a quarrel between him and Boldwood. She paces up and down and then sits down on some rocks to think, the dark earth and clouds contrasting with the sparkling stars to the east.

Now Bathsheba recognizes a potential conflict brewing between two of her three suitors, a conflict underlined in some ways by the ominous natural setting.

CHAPTER 32

Weatherbury is silent at night, and the farm is occupied only by Mary-ann. After eleven she awakens with an uneasy feeling, and looks out the window to see, in the paddock, a moving figure seize a horse and lead it out. She thinks it must be a gypsy man, and she rushes to Coggan's, the nearest house. He calls Gabriel, and they find the horse gone. Then they hear a trotting horse over Weatherbury Hill. Gabriel decides to pursue it, but Coggan says their horses will be too loud—Boldwood's would be better.

As the narration moves back to Bathsheba's Weatherbury farm, another kind of conflict seems to arise, as a shadowy figure enters and seizes one of the horses. While Gabriel may well feel resentful regarding Boldwood, who's also been competing for Bathsheba's affections, he recognizes that cooperation is the best way to resolve conflict in this environment.

Gabriel runs down to Boldwood's and returns with two horses. He and Coggan ride to the hill, but the gypsies that had camped there are gone. They continue straight, then decide to try to track the horses. They see a set of tracks that suggest a gallop; after riding awhile, they see another set suggesting a canter; then finally another at a trot, and a final implying that the horse, Dainty, is lame.

In the world of the novel, gypsies are located outside the known, familiar figures of the village, and are as threatening as a violent thunderstorm or crop blight. Gabriel and Coggan, though, are savvy enough to seek out the source of the conflict, in the interest of defending the farm.

Coggan and Gabriel race to the toll gate, and, seeing Dainty and its driver approach, ask the gatekeeper to keep the gate closed, as the driver has stolen their horse. But the keeper's lantern casts a light over the driver—it's Bathsheba. She's driving to Bath, she says: she had to leave at once. Gabriel says they thought the horse was stolen, and she says that was foolish—she couldn't wake Mary-ann or get into the house, so she simply took the coach-house key and left. She thanks them for the trouble, but says she's gotten a stone out from Dainty's shoe and can manage quite well from now on. After Bathsheba leaves, Coggan and Gabriel decide to keep this story quiet.

The potential conflict that Gabriel and Coggan hoped to resolve proves to be another kind of affair entirely, though one that's no less secretive and mysterious. Bathsheba maintains her cool and her position of authority as she scoffs at the idea that the horse would have been stolen. Still, Gabriel and Coggan's decision not to say anything reflects their understanding that Bathsheba has more to hide than she'd like to admit.


Bathsheba had decided she could either keep Troy away from Weatherbury, or give up Troy entirely. She dreamed a bit about the happy life she'd have had if Boldwood had been Troy. Then she'd decided to go see Troy himself, asking him to help her in her resolve (not thinking that seeing her lover might not help her make this choice). She'd wanted to prevent anyone from knowing she'd gone to Bath at all—a plan which clearly hadn't worked.

Bathsheba's decision turns out to be the result of her meditation following the encounter with Boldwood. Bathsheba indulges a little in dreams, but her rational side returns, though only to the extent of proposing a resolution to the conflict that, the narrator suggests, is not exactly foolproof.

CHAPTER 33

After a week, there's still no sign of Bathsheba: then Mary-ann receives a letter from her saying she'll be kept there by business another week. The oat harvest begins. One day the workers have stopped to rest when they see Cain running towards them. Mary-ann says she dropped her key this morning and it broke in two—an unlucky sign, so she hopes nothing is wrong.

As the seasons turn, the events of the novel take place along with the different kinds of tasks and labor of the farm. Once again, the farm hands rely on a kind of folk wisdom that mixes superstitious beliefs with more orthodox Christian ones..

Cain is in his Sunday clothes. He's had an injured finger so has taken time off; Poorgrass remarks that it was a bad leg that let him read the Pilgrim's Progress, while Coggan adds that his own father put his arm out of joint to court his future wife. Cain arrives, carrying bread and ham in one hand, and cries, nearly choking on his food, that he's been in Bath for his finger and has seen the mistress with a soldier, arm in arm like a true courting couple. He coughs—a gnat has flown down his throat—and Coggan gives him some cider so he can continue the story, while the others berate him as he coughs and sneezes.

Among these men, it's difficult for a story to ever get told without interruptions, delays, and digressions, as each small event reminds someone of something else. Cain's arrival is meant as a humorous set piece—he may have serious, consequential news to report, but such drama and intensity are deflated and given a picaresque touch by Cain's ridiculous behavior and almost slapstick plight.

His family has always been excitable, Cain says, and the others agree. Moon adds that Cain's grandfather was quite clever. But Gabriel interrupts impatiently to ask Cain to continue. He thinks the soldier was Troy: he saw them sit on a park bench, and saw Bathsheba begin to cry. When they left, though, she looked white and happy. When Gabriel asks what else he saw, he begins to talk about the city life in Bath, and Moon and Coggan interrogate him, fascinated.

As is often the case, the locals understand and describe each other as part of a long, generational line, a web of family connections and histories. Gabriel, in turn, has little patience for such digressions—he has had his own trepidations about Bathsheba's relationship with Troy.

On Gabriel's prodding, Cain describes Bathsheba's beautiful dress and hair. After lush descriptions of the houses, shops, and people of Bath, Cain finally concludes that he didn't see Bathsheba again. Gabriel is exasperated, but asks if he can swear that Miss Everdene was in fact the woman he saw. Cain is wary of swearing that it's "damn true" and, as Poorgrass sternly rebukes him for his language, begins to cry. Gabriel, shaking his head, turns back to work. When they're alone, though, Coggan asks him why it matters whom she's with, if it can't be Gabriel: that's what he tells himself, he replies.

Cain's story concludes comically, as he insists on Gabriel's patience even though he never has more to say about Bathsheba—though he's ensured the group's rapt attention as he talks about sophisticated city life. Although Coggan participates eagerly in the local gossip, he is also a good friend to Gabriel: he recognizes Gabriel's feelings for Bathsheba and tries to cheer him up.

CHAPTER 34

That evening, Gabriel is leaning over Coggan's garden gate when he hears Bathsheba and Liddy's voices from a carriage. Gabriel feels great relief. He lingers there until seeing Boldwood pass by, and then goes to bed. Meanwhile, Boldwood continues on to Bathsheba's farm. He's been in deep meditation recently, characterizing Bathsheba's actions as emblematic of all women. But now he feels better, and wants to ask her forgiveness for his temper.

Gabriel thinks that if Bathsheba has returned home, all cannot be lost—that she must have regained reason or at least her sense of independence and left Troy behind in Bath. Meanwhile, Boldwood recognizes that he had gone too far in insisting on his right to marry Bathsheba—another way of asserting man's power over women.


He asks Liddy to see Miss Everdene, but, in an odd mood, she says the lady cannot. Boldwood decides he must still not be forgiven. He's still wandering through Weatherbury, when he catches sight of Troy leaving his carriage and entering the carrier's house. Suddenly determined, Boldwood heads home and ten minutes later returns as if to call upon Troy. But as he approaches, he sees Troy leave the house, saying good night to those inside, apparently holding a carpet bag.

Boldwood initially still has hope that he might repair his relationship with Bathsheba, but upon seeing his rival he moves to encounter him, just the thing that Bathsheba had feared and wanted to prevent by going to see Troy in Bath. It's still unclear how, if at all, that conflict has been resolved.

Boldwood follows and addresses Troy, saying he wants to speak to him about a woman Troy has wronged. Troy tries to brush him off, but Boldwood insists, saying he's the only one who knows about Troy's relationship to Fanny Robbin: Troy should marry her. Troy says he probably should, but in a trickster's voice, says he's too poor.

Rather than speaking of Bathsheba directly, Boldwood chooses another tack, thinking that, given his knowledge of Troy and Fanny, he holds the advantage here. Troy, nonetheless, seems to be inspired to trick Boldwood himself.


Boldwood says that if Troy hadn't shown up, he'd almost certainly be engaged to Miss Everdene by this time. So he proposes that he'll give Troy fifty pounds now, fifty for Fanny to prepare for the wedding, and 500 on the wedding day, as long as the couple leaves Weatherbury. Boldwood recognizes all the weaknesses of this proposal. Troy says he does prefer Fanny, though she's only a servant: he agrees. Boldwood asks if he preferred her, why he ruined things in Weatherbury. Bathsheba ensnared him for a time, Troy says: now that's over. Boldwood hands him fifty sovereigns: when Troy reminds him that he has only his word, Boldwood hopes that Troy's shrewd enough to count on the 500 pounds.

Boldwood proposes a kind of business agreement with Troy, just as he had attempted to convince Bathsheba to marry him as more of a contract than a sign of her love or passion for him. Boldwood knows that Fanny's whereabouts are unknown and Troy is not exactly known to keep his word, but his desire to have Bathsheba for himself is enough for him to make the gamble despite the precariousness of the offer—which Troy reminds Boldwood of himself.


They hear a pit-pat, and Troy says he must leave to meet Bathsheba, who's expecting him, and wish her good-bye according to Boldwood's proposal. He may hide and listen to them, Troy says, as he steps forward. She says playfully that no one will know they've met. Troy says he's left his bag: she should run home, and he'll meet her in her parlor.

It appears that Troy had already agreed to meet Bathsheba before he encountered Boldwood, and now he cruelly plays with Boldwood's emotions in allowing him to see Bathsheba's infatuation with him.

When Bathsheba runs off, Troy mockingly asks Boldwood, whose face is nervous and clammy, if he should tell her he's given her up. Perhaps he's impulsive, but he can't marry them both, Troy says, and he now has two reasons for choosing family. Boldwood bursts out that he's hurting Bathsheba: Troy says she can only be saved now if he marries her. Boldwood wants to kill him, but finally says he should marry Bathsheba, in order to save her honor. Now Troy begins to mention Bathsheba's weaknesses, and Boldwood begs him to marry her anyway, as soon as possible. He'll give Troy the five hundred on the wedding day with Bathsheba. He only has eleven pounds now, which he gives to him.

Having witnessed Bathsheba and Troy, Boldwood is well aware now that Bathsheba has fallen for the soldier. Boldwood recognizes that he's just paid Troy to do something that would devastate the woman he loves—even though to undo his proposal would mean losing his own chances to be with Bathsheba. He also feels that Bathsheba is on the verge of giving herself to Troy and that it would ruin her honor, now, if he encouraged Troy to run away from her.

Together, they climb to the house. Troy opens the door, and then slides a newspaper through the slot back to Boldwood, telling him to read. It is an announcement of Troy's marriage to Bathsheba. Gleefully, Troy lists all Boldwood has paid him, first for one woman then the other. Fanny's left him, he says, and Boldwood immediately believed in Bathsheba's dishonor. He tells Boldwood to take his money back: Boldwood hisses that he won't, but Troy throws the gold into the road. As Boldwood rages, Troy laughs and locks himself in.

Troy has fully tricked Boldwood, making money for himself out of the bargain, but also laying low Boldwood's pride—seemingly for no other reason than his own capricious temperament and the satisfaction of doing away with a rival. Boldwood's temper returns with a vengeance when he realizes what's happened, but it's too late—Troy has won.

CHAPTER 35

Early the next morning, Gabriel and Coggan are reaching the fields when Gabriel thinks he sees something at an upper window of the farm. Sergeant Troy is looking leisurely out the window: Coggan exclaims that Bathsheba has married him. Gabriel looks at the ground, amazed all the same that it's been done so secretly. Troy sees them and cheerily calls to them. At first Gabriel doesn't reply, but after Coggan's prodding he wishes him good morning. Troy says he feels like new wine in an old bottle: he wants to spruce up the place, though Gabriel thinks that would be a pity. Troy says he'll join them at the fields soon, but for now he throws them a half-crown to drink to his own health. Gabriel turns away angrily, but Coggan takes it.

Like Boldwood, Gabriel is resentful and angry at Troy's cavalier, triumphant attitude at having married Bathsheba and ensured a comfortable existence for himself, but he manages to control his own temper better than Boldwood was able to. Meanwhile, Troy's insistence on modern methods of farming is portrayed as an unwelcome intrusion of town into country life, where little has changed for hundreds of years—even if to a certain extent this intrusion would turn out to be historically inevitable.

Coggan tells Gabriel that it's better for him to be outwardly friendly to their new master. They nod at Boldwood, who is passing by, his face colorless: Gabriel notices his despair, which matches his own.

Coggan reminds Gabriel of the need to be strategic and to compromise, something Gabriel understands but risks forgetting in his anger.

CHAPTER 36

One night at the end of August, Gabriel stands in the farm stackyard, looking at the ominous sky, with its metallic moon and thick clouds. Thunder is close by: it'll most likely be followed by a heavy rain, marking the end of dry season. Gabriel looks at the unprotected ricks holding six month's produce. Tonight is the harvest-supper and dance: as Gabriel approaches the barn, he sees extravagant decorations and fiddlers playing. One suggests they play next 'The Soldier's Joy,' and all roar in approval, especially Troy.

Gabriel is well acquainted with the natural environment and, thanks in part to his constant reading of the stars, understands how to interpret certain natural events. Here, he reads the signs that seem to foretell a violent storm and rain; he knows that the produce, representing both a great deal of time and a financial investment, is at risk.

Gabriel sends a message to Troy asking him to speak with him: Troy refuses, so Gabriel asks the messenger to tell him a heavy rain will fall soon, and they should cover the ricks. The messenger returns to say that it won't rain and he shouldn't be bothered any more.

Unlike Gabriel, Troy has little respect for natural forces outside his control—his solution to potential conflicts, natural and otherwise, is to pretend they don't exist.

Ill at ease, Gabriel leaves: he pauses at the door to hear Troy announce that it's also their wedding feast, so he's brought brandy for all the men. Bathsheba asks him not to give them more alcohol: one farmhand agrees that they've had enough. Troy scoffs, then says he'll send the women home: if the men aren't strong enough to drink, they'll have to work elsewhere.

Troy pays little attention to the way things are usually done on the farm. He fails to respect Bathsheba's authority, and he replaces it with his own iron hand, though in the service not of productivity or hard work but of his own sense of pleasure.

Bathsheba leaves indignantly, followed by the women and children. Gabriel stays long enough to be polite, then slips out too. He sees a large toad in the path—a message from Mother Nature. A garden slug comes inside his house, followed by black spiders; he goes outside and sees, over the hedge, the **sheep** crowded close together in a corner. He is even more certain now that he's right: the thunderstorm, then heavy rain, is a dangerous mixture.

Bathsheba doesn't directly challenge Troy's authority as her husband and, now, master of the farm, though she clearly isn't happy about it. Meanwhile, Gabriel continues to pay close attention to the signs coming from nature that portend violence, and that can only be mitigated rather than prevented.

Gabriel vows to save the produce, though behind this act is another motivation: wanting to help the woman he has so loved. He returns to the barn to get help, but the laborers are all in a drunken stupor, the glasses and cups littering the table. Troy had insisted that they continue to drink through the night. Depressed, Gabriel slips back out and goes to Susan Tall's house to get the granary key; then he returns and drags four large water-proof coverings across the yard. He continues to the wheat stacks and barley.

As he's done earlier, Gabriel decides to commit himself to the farm, explicitly in the interest of the economic investments involved, but also always because of his loyalty to Bathsheba, even if his pride prevents him from sharing with her the fact that he continues to love her. This loyalty is juxtaposed with Troy's thoughtlessness.

CHAPTER 37

Lightning begins to strike. Gabriel sees a light in Bathsheba's bedroom, and then more flashes, illuminating the fields. Gabriel wearily wipes his brow and carries a tethering chain up the ladder, as a lightning rod. In another flash, the figure of Bathsheba is illuminated beneath him. He's thatching on the rick, he calls down to her. She cries that the stacks are all neglected despite her husband's promise: she asks what she can do, and resolutely begins to follow Gabriel's orders.

As the storm rolls over the countryside, Gabriel prepares himself for a long, exhausting night, one that he recognizes may not be met with any grateful thanks. But then Bathsheba—who has been thoughtless herself before—arrives, seemingly inspired to act against her husband's carelessness and do her part in saving the farm's produce.

As Bathsheba fetches reed sheaves for Gabriel, they hear the first "Stygian" thunder following the heavenly light. She clutches Gabriel's sleeve in fear. After a few minutes, the lightning and thunder continue, and Gabriel marvels at the terrible beauty, and at the feeling of Bathsheba's trembling arm.

The storm is described as straddling heaven and hell; "Stygian" thunder refers to the river Styx of the underworld in classical mythology: the drama of this allusion is equaled, for Gabriel, by Bathsheba's touch.

Then, though, lightning slices the tall tree on the hill down its length in a loud crack: Gabriel tells Bathsheba they narrowly escaped, and she should go down. After a silence, they say that the storm seems to have passed. Gabriel marvels that no rain has yet fallen: now he'll go up again to continue thatching.

Chance and circumstance alone save Gabriel and Bathsheba from being struck themselves: having suffered from cold natural laws himself, Gabriel recognizes the need to respect such contingencies.

Bathsheba continues to help, as they've checked the barn and the others are still in a stupor. Bathsheba says tentatively that Gabriel must think she galloped away to Bath that night to get married. She wants to explain that she went fully intending to break off her courtship with Troy: owing to circumstances there they got married. She hopes for his better opinion now. She was alone in a strange city, and immediately began to fear scandal. Then Troy said he'd seen a more beautiful woman than herself that day, and couldn't be constant if they didn't get married: between jealousy and distraction, she whispers, she did.

As Bathsheba helps Gabriel, she also reveals herself to be still in search of Gabriel's good opinion and respect—even if her pride prevents her from acknowledging how much she cares about his feelings for her in any less vague way. Still, her frankness and honesty show that she's lost some of her insistence on pride, since she reveals to Gabriel the real, not quite romantic reason for her marriage to Troy.

Gabriel doesn't reply, and Bathsheba quickly adds that Troy wasn't to blame. She doesn't want him to say anything more about it, and continues with the sheaves. Gently, Gabriel tells her to go to sleep: he can finish this alone. She thanks him gratefully, and Gabriel continues to work, musing on how contradictory her female nature can be. Suddenly he hears the vane shift: the change in wind foretells a disastrous rain.

While Bathsheba has an impulse to confide in Gabriel, she's also concerned to keep some of her pride; and while on some levels she recognizes that Troy's behavior is unsavory, she also continues to love him. Gabriel's thoughts on female contradictions don't do full justice to this complex dance.

CHAPTER 38

It's now 5 a.m., and the wind keeps shifting ominously. A drop of rain hits Gabriel's face as the wind snarls around him. Then it begins to fall more heavily. He recalls fighting against fire eight months earlier in the same place he's fighting against water now: his love has continued all the while. He hears voices from the barn: the guests are leaving, abashed.

From one crisis to another, Gabriel has internalized an understanding of nature's power over humans, respecting such forces even while working to combat their destructiveness (a similar attitude to the one he has in love).

Soon Gabriel too returns home. He passes Boldwood, and they each comment on the other's haggard appearance. Gabriel says he's been working on covering the ricks, and he asks Boldwood's if his are safe—he says no, that he overlooked the ricks this year. This has a dramatic effect on Gabriel, who understands how preposterous such forgetfulness would have seemed only a few months before.

Gabriel and Boldwood have increasingly come to recognize the similarity of their positions with respect to Bathsheba. Nonetheless, Boldwood's state, Gabriel begins to realize, is actually far more dire than his own, as it's interrupting his daily life and livelihood.

Finally Boldwood does admit that he's been out of sorts lately. Gabriel says he did think Bathsheba would marry him. Boldwood imagines he's the parish joke: Gabriel hastens to deny it, but Boldwood says the truth is that there was never any real engagement or promise. He turns his face to Gabriel and cries that he's weak, foolish, and grieving: sometimes he thinks it would be better to die than live. But then he says no woman ever had power over him for too long. He asks Gabriel not to repeat their discussion.

Gabriel may love Bathsheba himself, but having been rejected by her, he was also critical of her careless attitude towards Boldwood. Just as Bathsheba sought to defend her husband to Gabriel, here Boldwood defends Bathsheba to him, before making it more clear than ever that he's in great distress.

CHAPTER 39

On a Saturday evening in October Bathsheba is returning from market up a steep turnpike road. Troy is walking beside her. He's bought his soldier's discharge with Bathsheba's money and is insisting on becoming a modern farmer. Troy is protesting to Bathsheba that he would have made far more money if not for the rain, though she says it's the time of year for changeable weather. Bathsheba sadly reminds him that he's lost a hundred pounds this month in horseracing: it's cruel and foolish to waste money so. He says he was thinking of taking her to the races next week, though she begs him not to go.

Troy again introduces the idea of modernity into the more static landscape of Weatherbury, even though it also seems that he lacks the will and wherewithal to actually come through on his grand schemes. Meanwhile, Bathsheba struggles with Troy's profligate spending and gambling: she's used to being responsible with money, but she now has to face the reality that, in a marriage at the time, the husband controls the purse.

Troy says Bathsheba has lost all her former pluck and spirit. She looks away indignantly but resolutely. A woman appears on the hill, poor and sorrowful-looking. She asks Troy when Casterbridge Unionhouse closes at night. At the sounds of the voice, he starts, and slowly says he doesn't know. At hearing him speak, the woman looks both happy and anguished: she cries and falls.

While Bathsheba is concerned with the very real, present problems of management and of married life, Troy is as careless as a child, insisting on returning to the flirtations of their initial courtship. Suddenly, though, his carelessness is interrupted.

Bathsheba exclaims and prepares to get down, but Troy orders her to walk the horse up, while he deals with the woman. After beginning to protest, Bathsheba obeys. Troy helps Fanny up and asks how she ever came here, in a gentle but hurried voice. She says she has no money, and he gives her what he has. Fanny is silent.

Troy and Fanny both immediately recognized one another's voice. Troy's attitude now completely shifts: while he had been scornful and sarcastic to his wife, he seems earnestly worried about Fanny.

Troy tells Fanny to meet him Monday morning on Casterbridge Bridge: he'll bring all the money he can, and get her lodging somewhere. Troy returns to Bathsheba, who asks if he knew the woman. He says boldly that he does, but only by sight: Bathsheba doesn't believe him.

Bathsheba has lost much of her innocence and naiveté along with her pride: she's unable to guess what exactly the relationship between Troy and the woman is, but recognizes that he is adept at hiding things from her.

CHAPTER 40

Fanny continues walking, her steps growing feebler. She stops to sleep by a haystack, then awakens to see Casterbridge in the distance, and wonders if she'll ever get there. A clock strikes two and a carriage rolls past her. Fanny rises and continues on, resting again by a thicket: she opens a gate to find "faggots" or bundles of sticks where woodmen had been working. She snaps a few twigs off, using them as a crutch.

The narration shifts to Fanny's point of view. In some ways, Fanny's determination recalls Bathsheba's own forthright resolve—both women have that personality trait. But in other ways Fanny is far more vulnerable than Bathsheba, whose wealth protects her from such a dire state.

Fanny passes a milestone, then a second, but is then exhausted again. She falls once again, then rises and staggers to a rail fence: she can see the Casterbridge lights, though there's not a sound. She has less than a mile to go, she tells herself, moving from one post to the next. She crawls to the end of the rails, telling herself she has only a half mile more. But she can't move anymore: she gives in and closes her eyes.

The description of Fanny's increasingly halting steps is excruciating in its detail: in terms of physical distance, Fanny is near her goal, but in terms of the physical and psychological strength it requires, she is almost unable to reach it.

Fanny becomes conscious again and a dog is licking her cheek. Hopefully, she points in the direction of Casterbridge so he might fetch someone. But as she doesn't follow, he returns, then whines when she can't accompany him, tugging at her dress. They move slowly together to the hill, and finally reach a picturesque building, covered by ivy: the Union. A man emerges and lifts Fanny through the door, as he and other women wonder how she got there.

Here the book offers an example of an instance when chance and circumstance intervenes for the better, as Fanny is helped along by an animal (whereas Gabriel's over-eager dog, George's son, had contributed to his own disaster and tragedy).

CHAPTER 41

That same evening, Troy asks Bathsheba for 20 pounds, and her face sinks. First he says it's for the races, but when Bathsheba again begs him not to go with dignified beauty, he says it's not for the races at all, though he refuses to say for what. She says if she pays she has the right to know, pouting a little, but he tells her not to go too far or she'll regret it. Bathsheba says she already regrets the end of her romance: that's what happens at marriage, her husband says.

Bathsheba no longer trusts Troy with money, nor with much else. Troy, meanwhile, continues to be able to get his own way, though he is still susceptible to Bathsheba's beauty. Yet Troy is now cruel to Bathsheba in a way he never was when they were courting, only cementing Bathsheba's loss of romantic illusions.

Sighing, Bathsheba gives him the money. Troy looks at his **watch** and reflexively opens its back case, revealing a lock of hair. Bathsheba gasps: he says it's hers, but she's seen that it was yellow hair. Finally Troy admits that it was someone who he was going to marry before her: she's unmarried, alive, and pretty, he replies to his wife's questions.

While Gabriel's watch aligns with his pragmatic, problem-solving character, Troy's is emblematic of his own frivolity and thoughtlessness, even if it's also tied to his earnest feelings—though feelings for another woman than his wife.

Troy tells Bathsheba not to be jealous, driving her almost to tears. She cries that he's cruel to her, and asks her to burn the lock. Troy says there is reparation to be made that she knows nothing of: he too repents of marrying her. But she now, trembling, says she only repents if he loves another more than her. If he does, she cannot do anything. Now Troy says he hasn't looked at the lock for months: it was the meeting with the woman today that reminded him.

Bathsheba knows a great deal about penance and reparations: here, even while Troy fails to imagine that she is familiar with such a reality, there is another parallel drawn between these two imperfect though, in different ways, earnest people. Troy waffles back and forth, as Bathsheba did with Boldwood, regarding his feelings.

Bathsheba begs Troy for honesty, but he snaps at her to not be so desperate, and leaves. She begins to sob, but then determines to repress her feelings and maintain her pride. Before Troy she'd been proud of her position as independent woman, scorning girls who fell for the first handsome man who saluted them and who were obsessed with marriage. Bathsheba was a kind of Diana, self-sufficient and respectable: now she wishes she had never left such a life.

Troy lashes out at Bathsheba in a cruel way, even though she's had a temper herself in the past. But here Bathsheba's pain also has to do with her recognition of her vulnerable role as Troy's wife, as well as of everything she's lost as a result of an impetuous choice, including her majestic, goddess-like authority.


The next morning Bathsheba walks across the farm. She thinks of Gabriel, who is now like a brother to her: at times she wonders what life would have been like with him, or Boldwood, but she's not often subject to such musings. Then she sees Boldwood approach Gabriel across the field: while talking, both are saluted by Poorgrass, who is wheeling a barrow of apples towards the house. Bathsheba asks him for the news. He says Fanny Robbin is dead. She belongs to their parish, so Boldwood is going to send a wagon to fetch the body and bury her. Bathsheba says that Fanny was her uncle's servant, so she will do so. Bathsheba is beset by sympathy, now that she knows suffering herself. She asks how long Fanny has lived here. Poorgrass says just a day or two: she's been a seamstress in Melchester, and arrived at the Union-house on Sunday, having walked all the way.

While the novel occasionally depicts Bathsheba as indulging in imaginative fancy, it also underlines her willingness and ability to put aside such dreams and deal with the reality at hand—in this she is more like Gabriel than Troy or, for that matter, Boldwood. Like Gabriel, too, Bathsheba has changed and grown more mature and sympathetic as a result of her own suffering. She thinks of Fanny as a woman who in some ways is comparable to herself—even if Fanny's vulnerability went far beyond Bathsheba's and ultimately led to her death.

Suddenly, Bathsheba asks if Fanny walked on the turnpike road: she did, Poorgrass says, before remarking that Bathsheba looks pale. Fanny passed Weatherbury Saturday night. Before sending him off, Bathsheba asks what color her hair was; he can't remember. He repeats everything he heard from Boldwood and Gabriel, and says he imagines she might have died simply from exposure. Bathsheba intently asks if he's heard another story: he hasn't. She wonders, looking down, why Gabriel hasn't told her himself, but Poorgrass says he was perhaps busy.

Bathsheba, savvier than before her marriage to Troy, begins to piece together a possible connection between Fanny Robbin, the woman whom Bathsheba and Troy saw on Saturday night, and the lock of hair in Troy's watch. This time, nonetheless, local gossip and knowledge fail to fill in the mystery for Bathsheba, who for now has to be content with suspicion.



Going inside, Bathsheba asks Liddy what the color of Fanny Robbin's hair was—it was beautiful golden hair, she says. Her young man was a soldier in Troy's regiment, she adds: Troy once told her he knew the young man as well as he knew himself, and looked a great deal like him. Bathsheba stops her petulantly.

Liddy's casual information doesn't put Bathsheba into a rage, but does bring out her more impetuous, heady side, as she shifts again from confidant to mistress when she doesn't hear what she wants to.

CHAPTER 42

A wall surrounds Casterbridge Unionhouse, except for a gable with a small door, a few feet above the ground: it's used only for passage to and from the outside. Poorgrass rings the bell and backs his wagon against the high door: a coffin is thrust through. One man writes the name and date atop it in chalk and covers it with a black cloth. Poorgrass places flowers around it, as Bathsheba has requested, and turns back as mist covers the fields and the autumn fogs arrive.

This somber scene again uses description of nature, the mist and fog of autumn, to underline the emotional as well as physical atmosphere of the setting. Fanny may have been without friends or family at the time of her death, but now she has become the collective responsibility of the parish and its inhabitants.

Wishing he had company, Poorgrass continues on, hearing a mournful tapping of dew from the leaves. He stops by an old inn, the Buck's Head, with a sign hanging from an elm opposite the street. This is an inn where old country slang can be heard: Poorgrass is cheered upon seeing it, and stops to go inside, where he sees Coggan and Clark. He tells them that his companion was beginning to chill him. He drinks with them, then says he must leave for the church yard. Coggan says it's a shame there's no one to pay the shelling and half-crown for the bell and grave: Poorgrass says the parish pays for the grave alone, though Bathsheba will probably pay for everything.

Poorgrass, shy and timid as he is, is not exactly the most ideal person to be responsible for transporting a coffin through a silent countryside. He's most comfortable and at home around the other members of the "Greek chorus" of farm hands, some of whom have now met not at Warren's malt-house but at another drinking hole. Now the gossip centers around Fanny Robbin and the parish's role in dealing with her, in the absence of family.

Clark entreats Poorgrass to stay: the poor woman is dead, after all, he says. Poorgrass is a bit worried about Providence: he's been drunk already this month, and didn't go to church on Sunday. Coggan calls Poorgrass a dissenter, though he denies it, and says he's never changed a single doctrine—he'll stick to his side, and will fall with it if it turns out to be wrong. The longer Poorgrass stays, the less he feels troubled by the duties that await him. Finally, Coggan's **watch** strikes six.

The farm hands again mix various belief systems in stitching together a view of their own world and their responsibility for village affairs. Their digressions lend another comic touch to a narrative that has become increasingly dramatic and grave, as alcohol eases Poorgrass's sense of unease.

At that moment Gabriel appears in the doorway, and cries that he's ashamed of Poorgrass and Coggan. Clark asks him not to go on so; Coggan adds that no one can hurt a dead woman—if she'd been alive he would have helped her quickly. Clark agrees and begins to sing a tune, but Gabriel snaps at him to stop, and cries that Poorgrass is drunk. Meekly, Poorgrass says he has a multiplying eye—he sees two of everything, as if he was Noah at the entrance to the ark. Gabriel realizes that no one here can take charge of the wagon, so he closes the door and gets in himself.

Once again, it is Gabriel's arrival that puts an end to the revelry, as he reminds the farm hands of the attitude that they should take in response to Fanny's death—even if Clark, Coggan, and Poorgrass take a more pragmatic view regarding the cycle of life and death. The comparison of Poorgrass to Noah is another light comic touch that counters Gabriel's own seriousness.

The village has learned the rumor of Fanny Robbin's death, but thanks to Gabriel's and Boldwood's discretion, no one knows her young man was Troy. Gabriel hopes it will stay silent for a short time, at least. He arrives at the church yard too late for the funeral to take place that night: the parson, Mr. Thirdly, says the body will have to stay at the farm or be carried on to the church.

Usually information like that of Fanny's relationship to Troy travels rapidly from person to person—very few are as insistent on maintaining such respect for another as Gabriel and Boldwood, who are also, of course, influenced by their feelings for Bathsheba.

Ill at ease, Gabriel goes to ask Bathsheba what she'd prefer. She's in a strange, perplexed mood: at first she says it's fine for the body to be brought to the church, but then suddenly wants to care for Fanny, so she decides the body should be brought inside the house and treated thoughtfully. Mr. Thirdly agrees, saying she is still a member of God's flock though she may have erred.

Bathsheba is dealing with a number of contradictory feelings; it's increasingly dawning on her that Fanny and Troy may have had a relationship, but she still feels pity for Fanny's fate, and responsibility for her uncle's former servant.

Everyone but Gabriel leaves the room, but he lingers. He raises the cloth and sees the chalk writing: it says "Fanny Robbin and child." He wipes out the two final words, then leaves.

Gabriel continues to put thoughts of Bathsheba before all, as he seeks to at least delay the pain that this knowledge would cause.

CHAPTER 43

Bathsheba bids Liddy goodnight, saying she doesn't need her any more, though Liddy offers to remain with the body herself. But first Bathsheba asks if Fanny was sickly, or if anyone had noticed any delicacy: Liddy says no. Bathsheba murmurs that it would be impossible to die of consumption the day after walking for miles. Finally, she asks if Liddy's heard anything strange said about Fanny, then bursts into tears: Liddy, astonished, says no. Bathsheba apologizes and bids Liddy good night.

While Bathsheba has begun to piece together some elements of the mystery, she still has to determine why Fanny should have died so suddenly, without having a weak constitution and after having walked for so long. Usually Liddy is a useful source of local knowledge and gossip, but here even she is just as blind to the reality of the situation as Bathsheba is.

Bathsheba is no lonelier now than before her marriage, but her loneliness is different. A strange mix of emotions led her to insist on having Fanny's body here: rebellion against her own prejudices and lack of charity towards a woman Troy loved before he loved her (and Bathsheba still does love him).

Bathsheba's loneliness now stems from the fact that she is far more aware of the pain and suffering, not just excitement, that life can hold. She now recognizes that life, including love, is never straightforward.

Liddy taps at the door and enters, saying hesitatingly that Mary-ann has heard a rumor: that there's *two* people in the coffin. Bathsheba trembles and says that's not written on the cover. Others don't believe it either, Liddy says: Gabriel is saying that this story was that of another poor girl.

Liddy does now relay news back to Bathsheba, as she often does with local gossip. It appears that Gabriel is attempting to stop the rumor in its tracks in order to prevent any more pain for Bathsheba.

Bathsheba wearily gazes into the fire for hours. She can imagine a connection between herself and Fanny's possible tragedy, which Gabriel and Boldwood could not suspect, since they didn't know she met Fanny on the road the Saturday before. Bathsheba longs for a stronger friend to help her, but there's no cooler woman than herself on the farm. She wishes she could go to Gabriel, who, though he seems less deep or strong than Boldwood, is better at looking at circumstances without thinking of his own best interests at each turn. If she asked him for the truth, honor would compel him to answer her honestly.

As Bathsheba sits before the fire, she begins to think through what she knows and suspects more explicitly than before, when wild conjectures pushed her to interrogate Coggan and Liddy. Again, Bathsheba recognizes the peculiar isolation of her situation as both woman and figure in authority. Here, too, she begins to see her three suitors and their characters more clearly than before.

Bathsheba walks to Gabriel's cottage, where he now lives alone. There's a light on: Gabriel is reading. Then he looks at his **watch** and gets up. Bathsheba can't bring herself to tap at the window and thus give him a hint about her misery. She lingers, watching Gabriel appear at the upstairs window and kneel to pray. The picture contrasts with her own agitation and rebellion, convincing her that she must bear her sorrow alone. She returns home.

At the beginning of the novel, Gabriel had peered into a private scene between Bathsheba and her aunt; now Bathsheba does the same thing to him, even though she recognizes that despite her attachment to Gabriel, the choices she has made prevent her from relying on him as a husband, and she must pay the price for that.

Bathsheba pauses in the hall and wishes aloud that Fanny could tell her her secret. After a few moments, she enters the room and, without thinking, opens the coffin. She says to herself that it is better to know the truth. At the girl's side is a newborn baby wrapped in white linen. Fanny is framed in her blonde hair, the color of Troy's lock. She looks young and round: her fairness takes away all sense of repulsion.

Part of Bathsheba's loss of pride and realization that she must pay the consequences of her actions is a renewed cold-bloodedness, not just in terms of her authority over the farm, but for any decision that will give her greater knowledge and help her decide what to do next.

Then Bathsheba returns to reality, and begins to weep. This is the one act that transformed Fanny's sorry condition into a grand one, her humiliation and failure to triumph and success. The Mosaic law of "burning for burning; wound for wound" applies to the payback of Fanny's pain with her own. Bathsheba imagines dying herself—but this would only be a copy of her rival. She cries that she could have been angry and cruel to Fanny alive, but cannot now that she's dead.

Despite her recent resolve and determination, this new sight is almost too much for Bathsheba, who is now faced with proof not only of her husband's preference of Fanny over her, but also of the true ramifications of her mistake. Penance, here, swells to become a defining feature of another character in the book, not just Bathsheba.

Recalling Gabriel's figure, Bathsheba too kneels to pray. In a kind of atonement, she takes flowers from a vase and lays them around Fanny's head. She forgets time. Suddenly, though, a coach door shuts, and Troy enters the hall, looking in on the scene. Troy can't imagine it's Fanny: he blankly asks what's happened. Bathsheba cries that she must go out. But Troy insists she stay: when he grabs her hand, she crumples, and they enter the room side by side. Troy looks into the coffin, and stands still, totally neutral. Bathsheba asks if he knows her: he does, and it is Fanny. He sinks forward, and gently kisses Fanny like an infant.

Even though she couldn't bring herself to call on Gabriel's guidance, Bathsheba draws strength from his example. Her wild, distraught emotions have eased into a somber show of mourning when Troy bursts in. Bathsheba has now recognized to some extent the nature of Fanny's and Troy's relationship, but she still loves Troy herself and seeks to respond to Fanny's death with him like a true couple—a desire that is cruelly thwarted by the kiss.

At that sight, Bathsheba springs towards him, embracing him and begging him to kiss her too. Troy looks at her, bewildered, realizing how similar all women are: he can't believe this is his proud wife, as Fanny's spirit seems to be there. But then his surprise turns to an imperious gaze and he says he won't kiss her. Fanny is more to him dead than Bathsheba ever was or will be, he says. He would have married her if he hadn't been tempted by Bathsheba's flirting ways. He now deserves to live in torment: he turns to Fanny, though, and says that in the sight of heaven she is his own. Bathsheba wails and asks what, then, she is: Troy says she is nothing to him. She turns and races out.

Bathsheba recognizes that, even in death, Fanny has triumphed over her in Troy's affections, but she still cannot rid herself of the feelings she has for her husband. Troy's teasing, flirtatious demeanor, meanwhile, has deformed into cruelty. At the same time, he too is realizing that one's actions have consequences and that he must pay penance himself for the lack of concern he showed to Fanny. Much of the book's tragedy is in the way these various personal duties fail to align.

CHAPTER 44

Bathsheba pays no attention to where she's going. She passes a thicket with Gabriel and beech trees, and enters to hide there. She sinks down by a trunk and closes her eyes. Later, gradually, she becomes aware of the call of sparrows, finches, and robins. Then she hears a ploughboy from her own farm approaching. Through the fern Bathsheba watches her horses stop to drink at a pond across the way. The glow of the rising sun breaks through the morning mist, but the swamp also has a wet and poisonous feeling. Bathsheba rises, frightened now by the place.

Bathsheba takes comfort in her natural environment, and yet as is so often the case in the novel, nature proves to be a hostile environment just as often as it offers comfort and solace to the characters. Still, the eeriness of the swamp where Bathsheba has fled aligns with and confirms her own feelings of despair and alienation from the place she's called her own.

Now a schoolboy comes into sight, trying to memorize a prayer by repeating it over and over: a small bit of amusement amid Bathsheba's tragedy. Now she is anxious, hungry and thirsty. But suddenly she sees Liddy come along the road, and calls out to her: Liddy makes her way through the swamp, and, teary-eyed, begins to question Bathsheba, who asks her not to. She asks if Fanny has been taken away yet: she'll be taken away at nine, Liddy says. She fetches some tea and food for Bathsheba, who doesn't want to go inside. Instead they wander through the wood for hours.

Even at heightened moments of conflict and tragedy, the novel introduces picaresque details relating to the more humorous aspects of country life. Liddy proves herself to be a constant and loyal companion of Bathsheba, even if her mistress has been subject to wild emotions and temper. While Bathsheba knows she'll have to face reality and her husband eventually, she can't bear to do so quite yet.

Bathsheba first wonders if she might never go home again. Then, though, she tells Liddy that only women without pride run away from their husbands. They return in a roundabout way to the house and enter at the back. She asks Liddy to make a disused attic comfortable for themselves and Mary-ann: she asks how they might pass time there. She dismisses Liddy's suggestions of knitting, sewing, and samplers, and asks Liddy to bring some old books. They remain there all day, though Troy doesn't appear in the neighborhood anyway.

After contemplating her situation alone in the swamp, Bathsheba has come to the conclusion that her pride—which has led her so astray in the past—will now force her to embrace a more dignified position rather than running away. All Bathsheba can do is try to mitigate the despair that she feels by distancing herself from Troy within their own home.

Bathsheba watches, at six in the evening, the young village men gather for a game of fives. Their game soon ends abruptly: Liddy says that it's because men are putting up a grand tombstone in the churchyard.

The young men's games seem far away from Bathsheba's plight, though ultimately everyone in the village is drawn into Fanny's tragedy.

CHAPTER 45

After Bathsheba ran out, Troy had thrown himself on the bed and waited, miserable, for the morning. That day he had put together 27 pounds and had driven to Casterbridge for his appointment with Fanny, and had sat down to wait, not knowing that she was being put into her grave clothes at that very moment. After hours, he bitterly rode on the races before returning home.

The narration shifts from Bathsheba to Troy, moving backwards in time in order to fill in his reaction to Fanny's death. The book once again underlines the earnestness of his feelings for Fanny that coexists with his petulant childishness.

In the morning, Troy rises and rides to Casterbridge, to the mason. He has no sense of economy or calculation: he wishes for something and wants it fulfilled like a child. So he tells the mason that he wants the best grave stone for 27 pounds, as soon as possible. The stonecutter shows him what he has in stock, and Troy writes out what he wants on the stone.

Again, like a child Troy has not learned to check his desires and work within a situation—quite unlike Gabriel, and even unlike Bathsheba at this point in the novel, who has lost pride but gained a more mature sense of the world.

After dark Troy leaves with a heavy basket and rides to Weatherbury churchyard. He brings a spade and lantern to the yard and begins to plant daisies, hyacinths, violets, and carnations around the tomb. He has no sense of absurdity about this romantic act. As he finishes, he feels a drop of rain, and decides to leave the finishing touches for the next day.

Troy's romanticism again emphasizes the depth of his love for Fanny; nonetheless, he is quick to abandon his romantic act at the least sign of trouble, as here with the approaching rain.

CHAPTER 46

The tower of Weatherbury Church is from the 14th century and has two Gothic gargoyles on each of its faces. Though most of the mouths no longer spout water, they are all equally hideous. The horrible one on the north-eastern side does still have a passage for water, and as Troy sleeps on the church porch, the stream thickens and pours right over Fanny's grave, drowning the carefully planted flowers and washing them away. Troy only awakens in broad daylight, when the sun is shining again. He reaches the grave and sees only a hollow around the tombstone.

The narration moves from Troy's perspective specifically to a general account, in what first seems like a digression on the history of Weatherbury Church. Nevertheless, this context ends up lending itself to another example of nature's unconcern regarding human affairs and desires, a lack of concern that can still, to humans, seem maliciously intent on flouting their will.

Troy usually can elude grief simply by pushing off troublesome thoughts. For almost the first time in his life, now, he cannot, and he wishes he were another man: he hates himself. Miserable, he stands and wonders where he should go. He's only been thoughtful for one full day—the source of wanting to care for Fanny's grave—and now he feels fate is jeering at him. He withdraws without doing anything to fix the grave, and leaves the village at once.

Again, like a child, Troy hasn't spent much time learning to develop a mature sense of the relationship between his actions and consequences, or of how to react when things don't go his way. He's unable to accept the cold indifference of the natural world, instead taking it as a personal insult.

Meanwhile Bathsheba remains in the attic with Liddy, and sleeps restlessly. At eight a.m. Liddy knocks and says she heard one strange noise in the night, apart from the heavy rain, like the boiling of a pot. Bathsheba asks if Troy has been in; she says she thinks he's gone to Budmouth, the horse-race site: Laban Tall saw him on that road before breakfast.

Moving back to Bathsheba's perspective, the book describes the affairs at the farm, where the same heavy rain is falling but where the tragedy of Fanny's death, and Bathsheba's recognition of her own plight, is being dealt with in its own way.

After breakfast Bathsheba leaves to walk towards church. Across the churchyard she sees Gabriel, who is looking at the tomb and disturbed grave. She follows his eyes and reads, "Erected by Francis Troy in memory of Fanny Robbin." Gabriel sees her, and Bathsheba's earlier emotion cedes to calm. She asks him simply to fill the hole, as she begins planting the flowers scattered around. She asks Gabriel to get the church wardens to turn the gargoyle's mouth, and finally wipes the mud from the tomb, then goes home.

Fanny was one of the first people that Gabriel met before starting his new life in Weatherbury, and he has his own reasons for paying respect to her. Bathsheba recognizes what Troy must have done, but rather than raging at cold nature like he did, she takes it upon herself to mitigate the ruined grave, enacting a kind of penance.

CHAPTER 47

Troy wanders towards the coast, desiring to find a home anywhere other than Weatherbury and the farm. He follows a perfectly straight, white road up a hill, and he treads up the path through the muggy air. At the top he sees the broad, still sea, amazed just as Balboa was at the sight of the Pacific. He descends to a bay enclosed by cliffs, and decides to bathe there.

Troy is compared, here, to the first European to set eyes on the Pacific: the book both supports such a noble, tragic view of him, and undercuts it with its depiction of Troy as a childish, selfish man unable to deal with reality.

Troy jumps in and swims between two projecting rocks. But he's caught by a current and is carried out to sea. Now he remembers the danger of this place, where others have died before him. He exhausts himself trying to swim back, and finally decides to tread water at a slight incline. He fixes his eyes at a far distant point where he might land: then, suddenly, he sees a boat in the distance. His energy returns and he swims vigorously toward it, trying to hail the sailors by splashing and shouting. In a few minutes they reach him and haul him in.

Another similarity between Troy and Bathsheba is their impulsiveness and thoughtlessness: while Bathsheba has learned to curb such features, Troy clearly hasn't—only when it's too late does he remember about the danger of the place. Still, circumstances (rather than any intentional act) favor Troy, and he's saved from drowning.

After resting, Troy tells his tale and asks to be put ashore at his bathing place. It's evening by the time they reach the shore, and Troy realizes that there's no sign of the clothes he left, and he has nothing left to his name. One of the sailors says they're in need of another hand for a voyage sailing from Budmouth Troy asks how long it will be: six months. He decides to accept, thinking grimly that he's doing Bathsheba a favor. As night falls, the boat rides towards the port.

Troy's impulsiveness ends up making the decision for him yet again. This time, though, his choice to leave Weatherbury and his wife is, while still selfish, more intentional than thoughtless. He recognizes how much Bathsheba must loathe him and convinces himself that his abandonment is better for her.

CHAPTER 48

Bathsheba feels slightly surprised, then relieved, though mostly indifferent, at Troy's absence. Her youthful pride has weakened, and her anxiety with it. Sooner or later he'll return, and their days on the farm will be numbered. There was initially some concern about Bathsheba as her uncle's successor, as a woman, but her success until her marriage had put off such fears: Troy's debts would put an end to that.

The wild emotions that characterized Bathsheba's initial courtship with Troy, as well as the discovery of his relationship to Fanny, have ceded to indifference, even as Troy's abandonment threatens to ruin her prior independence and authority as owner of the farm.

On Saturday she goes to Casterbridge alone for the first time since her marriage. At the market, she hears one man ask another for help finding Mrs. Troy: her husband has drowned. Bathsheba gasps, then faints. Boldwood, who's been watching, caches her. As they hear that a coast guard found Troy's clothes, his face flushes. He carries Bathsheba to a private room, where she opens her eyes, asking to go home.

Just as he watched Bathsheba for the first time at the market after receiving her valentine, now Boldwood continues to observe her, ready to intervene at any sign of trouble. The tragedy of Troy's apparent death presumably means something quite different for Boldwood.

Boldwood gathers his senses, still thinking of the feeling of Bathsheba in his arms. He offers to get her a driver, but she declines, and once recovered drives home herself. Liddy meets her, asking if she might find some mourning clothes to wear. But Bathsheba says he must be alive: she feels it.

Initially, Bathsheba refuses to believe the evidence of Troy's death—she has come to understand the extent of his trickery and deception, and is unwilling to fall for it as she has before.

On Monday, though, Bathsheba's conviction begins to be shaken: the newspaper contains the testimony of a young man from Budmouth who says he was passing over the cliff and saw a bather carried by the current. After dusk set in, he saw no more. Then, Troy's clothes arrive, and she's convinced that he undressed meaning to dress again soon. Bathsheba wonders if Troy wanted to follow Fanny into the next world. She opens his **watch** case that night, and makes to throw the lock of hair into the fire, but then pauses: she'll keep it in memory of the poor girl.

It is only when Bathsheba is faced with strong proof of her husband's death that she decides she can trust the reports. Bathsheba is left alone, abandoned by Troy as well as by the lover that he preferred to herself. Still, Bathsheba's rivalry with Fanny mingles with both pity and with the knowledge that they were both made to suffer by Troy.

CHAPTER 49

As winter goes on, Bathsheba reaches a mood of calm, though not peace: she feels pain that Troy is not still hers. She's lost interest in the farm, but keeps it going out of instinct. She does install Gabriel as bailiff to take on what she no longer cares to do.

Despite her suspicion, maturity, and knowledge, Bathsheba still does love Troy, a sentiment that persists and comingles with her general indifference.

Boldwood lives secluded: it's whispered that forgetfulness has nothing to do with the strange neglect that has led to the ruin of his crops. Finally Boldwood calls for Gabriel and suggests he take over supervision of his farm as well. At first Bathsheba objects, though languidly, that it's too much, but Boldwood insists. Gabriel grows wealthier and more handsome than ever, though some whisper that he's cheap—he lives in no better style than before. But he cares little for public opinion and is a man of habit.

Bathsheba's indifference and grief are in some ways echoed by Boldwood's own seclusion, even if his strange ways preceded Fanny's death and can instead be traced back to his refusal by Bathsheba and his humiliation by Troy. Meanwhile, Gabriel's steady ascendance begins to provoke rumors, though the narrator intervenes against them.

Boldwood, meanwhile, has begun to nourish a renewed hope regarding Bathsheba, who has now been persuaded to wear mourning clothes. He hopes she might be chastened from her past, and willing to marry him, in the future, if she marries anyone again. He gets his chance during the haymaking, where he asks after Bathsheba to Liddy. He awkwardly gets around to asking if she ever considers marrying again. She never alludes to it, Liddy says, thinking Boldwood is acting stupidly, but then says she once supposed she might marry after seven years. When Liddy asks if Boldwood has talked to her about it, he reddens, then goes away, ashamed at himself.

Boldwood's intervention when Bathsheba fainted, having just learned of her husband's death, has reintroduced the woman to him in the flesh, rather than as an abstraction or idea. Liddy obviously thinks that Boldwood's hopes regarding Bathsheba are deluded, but the information she gives him will end up being of sufficient weight for him to grasp and cling onto, even as he recognizes how far he has fallen from his former pride.

CHAPTER 50

In September the Greenhill Fair takes place, the annual **sheep** fair that draws crowds from far away. Bathsheba's and Boldwood's flocks require a great deal of attention to make it there, though Weatherbury isn't as far. They wind over the fields and hills and file in around nine in the morning, joining other South Down and Wessex horned breeds, all bleating and panting while buyers wind around the pens.

Amid the personal and social dramas and tragedies of Weatherbury, daily life does go on, and the running of the farm continues, necessitating constant care and attention; the Greenhill Fair is the culmination of months of work at the farm.

On another part of the hill a circus tent is being erected, preparing for the "Performance of Turpin's Ride to York and the Death of Black Bess," retelling an 18th-century tale of a famous highwayman. Coggan and Poorgrass, among many others, jostle each other to enter the tent. At the back, in one of the dressing tent, is Sergeant Troy.

The fair is not only an economic highlight of the year but also a social one. Suddenly, into this frivolous and entertainment-driven setting, drama intervenes again in the appearance of Troy.

After Troy had embarked in Budmouth he had traveled to the United States and earned his keep as professor of gymnastics, sword exercise, and fencing. After a few months of this precarious life, he recalled his taste for comforts, and knew he had a home waiting for him. Finally he did return to England, though kept putting off going home because of the unpleasantness that would await him—not to mention his responsibility for Bathsheba should the farm fail.

The narration dips back into the last several months of Troy's life, including his wanderings around the world—wanderings that signal again Troy's self-centeredness and lack of determination or ambition, as well as his relatively lack of pride compared to Bathsheba, Gabriel, or even Boldwood.

That summer, Troy fell in with a travelling circus, where he was hired based on his shooting skills from his time in the army. He decided to stay on when he was offered the role of Turpin for a few weeks, though he had no definite plan for after that.

Troy has relied on his army skills in the past to impress and woo Bathsheba; now he uses them as a crutch again in order to stay afloat amid uncertainty.

Now Bathsheba too is curious to see Turpin, the grandest show in the fair. As she waits outside, Boldwood comes up to her and asks her nervously about her **sheep**. They begin to talk about the Turpin play: Boldwood says he'd be pleased to get her a seat, and when she hesitates he says he's seen it already, so he won't stay. Bathsheba agrees and Boldwood escorts her to her reserved seat. The rest of the public is standing on the edge, so many turn to look at her.

The sheep prove to be an unproblematic conversation point between Bathsheba and Boldwood, though also an opportunity for Boldwood to try to get closer to her yet again. Still, he knows now that it's better not to break forth with passion as he did in the past.

Troy peeps out of the tent to see his wife sitting like a queen above the rabble. He realizes she's bound to recognize his voice, and feels entirely unprepared, especially now that Bathsheba looks so charming and powerful. He also now feels a new shame at her finding him in such embarrassing employment. He rushes over to the manager, and exclaims that he has an enemy in the tent who will nab him if he opens his mouth. The play must proceed, the manager says, but Troy refuses to open his mouth. Finally the manager tells him to go on with it, without the speeches: no one will know they've been left out.

Only now, when he sees Bathsheba in person, does Troy recall a sense of pride—a sentiment that isn't an independent character trait for him so much as part of his general attitude towards women, whom he always wants to impress and seduce. Troy uses his quick wit to get out of speaking out loud in front of Bathsheba and buys some time to reflect on his next move.

Indeed, nothing goes awry, especially since Troy disguises himself with even more make up. But he's relieved to have it over. At the end of the second performance, where he does speak aloud, he catches sight of the Bailiff Pennyways, his wife's enemy, who has surely recognized him. Now he knows his only chance is to make a friend of Pennyways.

Bathsheba had fired Pennyways after he had been found stealing: Troy recognizes a fellow trickster in the bailiff and understands that in order to get what he wants (whatever he decides that means) he'll have to work with another.

Troy dips into the refreshment tent, where he cannot see Pennyways, though he can see Bathsheba at the other end. He goes around the back and listens: she's talking to a man. He makes a cut in the tent cloth so as to peer in from above: she's with Boldwood, and Troy feels another unexpected jolt of attraction. But he again thinks of her pride and how she'd respond at learning he's a circus performer.

Initially, Troy is indignant that Bathsheba is talking to a man, as he continues to think of her as his own "property." In addition, the presence of Bathsheba reminds Troy that he was always, indeed, attracted to her physically, which makes her continue to have a certain power over him

Bathsheba thanks Boldwood for her cup of tea, and she insists on paying for it herself. Suddenly Pennyways enters and tells her he has private information for her. She coolly says she can't hear it now. He says he'll write it, and writes, "Your husband is here. I've seen him. Who's the fool now?" then folds it and tosses it into her lap, leaving with a laugh.

Troy learns both that the meeting between Bathsheba and Boldwood isn't exactly a romantic one, and—thanks to his position spying on the pair—that Pennyways has in fact recognized him and threatens to ruin his advantage of surprise.

Boldwood offers to destroy the note, but Bathsheba says carelessly that it would be unjust not to read it, though it can't be anything important. She holds it in her hand and, taking a piece of bread, allows her hand to drop close to the tent. Suddenly, skillfully, Troy slips his hand under the cloth, snatches the note, and races away as she screams in astonishment. He goes in search of Pennyways, whom he finds in the dancing tent: he whispers and beckons to him.

Bathsheba's indifference extends even into the realm of gossip and intrigue that so often characterizes village life in the novel. Meanwhile, relying on his skills of sly subterfuge, Troy manages to head off disaster and also turn Pennyways' own desire for intrigue back to his advantage.

CHAPTER 51

Since Poorgrass is now suffering from his 'multiplying eye,' and Gabriel is busy, Bathsheba accepts Boldwood's offer to ride aside her as she drives home herself. She'd rather have Gabriel's company, but resolves to be civil to Boldwood. She pities him, recognizing how devoted he still is.

Bathsheba continues to think of one former suitor as a devoted friend and confidant, but of the other as a victim of her thoughtlessness, for which she thinks she'll have to continue to do penance.

Suddenly, Boldwood asks if Bathsheba will marry again some day. She says she hasn't thought of it, and indeed she's not legally a widow: gently, she says while she at first doubted Troy's death, she now has no more doubts, yet still would never think to marry another. After a pause, Boldwood reminds her of when he carried her, fainting, in his arms: he will never recover from her refusal to marry him.

Boldwood's second proposal of marriage takes shape within a different landscape than the first, now that Bathsheba is in mourning and yet not a legal widow. Bathsheba tries to balance her ethical requirements as widow with her pity for Boldwood.

Boldwood asks if Bathsheba likes or respects him. She says it's difficult to define her feelings in a language made for men's. She does regret her behavior towards him: he asks if she might repair the wrong by marrying him. She cannot say; certainly not now, but perhaps, she says, as he prods her, at a future time—say six years. She cries that that seems long, though he says it will be short. Boldwood tells her he is willing to protect her for the rest of their lives, and there would be no fault in making such a bargain with him: that if she marries again it will be him.

While Boldwood keeps insisting on measuring Bathsheba's feelings for him, Bathsheba objects to the question entirely, as well as to the social landscape in which men both rule and demand that women find a way to fit into their own constructions of society. But Boldwood is deaf to such protests: he feels that while love might be too much to ask, a mere contract might work.

Almost afraid, she says she'll never marry another while Boldwood wishes her to be his wife. But she hesitates to promise to marry him in six years. She finally is persuaded to think about it until Christmas, and give her answer then. Bathsheba feels coerced by a force stronger than her own will.

Bathsheba can't imagine ever marrying someone else, so this first promise seems more possible for her to make; Boldwood, meanwhile, has traded his brief calm for his former intensity.

One day Bathsheba is working with Gabriel and mentions Boldwood: Gabriel says he'll never forget her. Suddenly Bathsheba shares with Gabriel her anxiety about her promise. She admits she worried Boldwood would go insane if she didn't promise to consider it: she holds his future in her hand. Gabriel tells her that his manner has always been dark and strange, but that it couldn't hurt to make the conditional promise.

Now Bathsheba feels that she's not only caused Boldwood pain as a result of her one careless action—he's actually, as a result of his love for her, going mad. Gabriel tries to convince Bathsheba that she doesn't need to take on this as well as her own responsibility, even if he recognizes that she may be right.

Bathsheba says the scheme is absurd, and asks if it wouldn't be immoral. What stops it from being immoral, Gabriel says, is that she doesn't care for him: a mere contract isn't wrong. There is, though, he says, a sin in thinking of marrying someone one doesn't love. Bathsheba says she's willing to pay that penalty for her idle jest. She wishes she could pay him damages in money for what she did. This, though, is penance if only because she hates the idea of marriage so much now, as well as the class of women that she'd seem to belong to if she married Boldwood.

With Troy's apparent, though not fully proven, death, Bathsheba is once again unmoored from her sense of what is right and wrong: she wants to do her duty but now reaches out for the opinion of another to help her figure out what her duty even is. Bathsheba momentarily imagines a kind of financial penance, which for her would be eminently preferable to a moral one.

Gabriel says it depends whether Bathsheba really thinks, like everyone else, that Troy is dead: she says she's long ceased to doubt it. He suggests she speak to Mr. Thirdly, but she says she wants a broad-minded opinion: she prefers the parson's opinion on law and the lawyer's on doctoring, for instance. In love, though, she sticks to her own opinion: Gabriel, with a sad smile, says there's a mistake in that logic. She pauses, then bids him good evening. She has a slight pang that he never once wished her free so that he could marry her himself. She wouldn't have listened to it, but his lack even of playful jest hurts her.

Gabriel is more pragmatic than Bathsheba, although he considers her dilemma with all the thoughtfulness that she asks from him. At the same time, while Bathsheba begins to speak to him in a way that could be construed as teasing, Gabriel remains serious and unmoved. Once again, even while Bathsheba doesn't love (or doesn't believe she loves) Gabriel, she's hurt by the way he seems to have lost all his feelings for her.

CHAPTER 52

On Christmas eve, Boldwood is to give a great party. This is quite unusual for him, and the village is buzzing with talk. From six to noon the decorations are brought in, and a fire is made in the grand hall: still, the house can't shake off its habitual solemnity.

The reason for Boldwood's party is most likely evident to most in the village, who know him well enough to recognize such joviality as an aberration for him.

Bathsheba is dressing in her room, and asks Liddy to stay with her: she feels agitated, as she hasn't spoken to Boldwood since the fall, and didn't know there would be such a party. She's the cause of it, she says. She wishes she'd never seen Weatherbury—she's never been free from trouble since moving here. She asks for her mourning dress: Liddy says it's not necessary, but Bathsheba doesn't want people to talk.

Bathsheba had asked Boldwood to wait until Christmas for an answer to his proposal, and now fully realizes that she can no longer put off deciding between competing understandings of morality. She's also still acutely aware that many eyes in the village are on her.

Boldwood is also dressing with his tailor, more fastidiously than ever. Finally the tailor leaves and Gabriel comes in to report on the day's farming progress. Boldwood hopes he'll see Gabriel that night. Gabriel quietly says he'll try, though perhaps not until later. He remarks that Boldwood seems more cheerful, and Boldwood agrees, though he says his mood rests on a slender hope.

Gabriel has found himself tied to Boldwood in more ways than one, both in terms of economic affairs and regarding their feelings for Bathsheba. While they've shared grief for her before, now their attitudes couldn't be more opposed.

Boldwood asks Gabriel to tie his neckerchief, then feverishly asks if a woman keeps her implied promise. Gabriel answers with bitterness, and Boldwood says he's gotten overly cynical recently. Boldwood hopes that he might be able to expect a positive answer from Bathsheba, and that they might be married, now in five years and nine months. Gabriel reminds him that he was once deceived, and not to build too much on promises, but Boldwood says she keeps her word.

Gabriel's bitterness stems from the fact that he feels he has to help and defend Boldwood, even though that means that he's helping his rival attain just what he would want for himself. He's also more prudent than Boldwood, though, and recognizes that his rival may well be far too optimistic.

Troy is sitting in a Casterbridge tavern when Pennyways enters. Troy asks if he's seen Lawyer Long: he wasn't at home, the bailiff says. Troy can't imagine he should be held liable for anything if he seemed to be drowned and then wasn't, though Pennyways says that changing his name and so forth makes him a cheat, possibly punishable by law.

As Troy plots his next move, he's eager to ensure that his return to Weatherbury won't jeopardize his own safety—he isn't quite sure if his deception was legally wrong rather than merely emotionally devastating for his wife.

Pennyways also hasn't been able to learn whether there's anything really between Bathsheba and Boldwood. She's not fond of him, though, he thinks. Troy says she's a handsome woman, and asks how she looked recently. She looked well but haughty, as usual, Pennyways says. Troy tells him to be loyal to himself, and this haughty goddess won't hurt him.

Troy has also been using Pennyways as a source of local knowledge and gossip. While Troy never hesitated to wound Bathsheba by telling her how much he preferred Fanny, he can't stand the idea of his "property" being stolen by another.

Bathsheba asks Liddy how she looks, and Liddy flatters her: Bathsheba worries that people will think she's trying to snare Boldwood. She sighs that her feelings swing from wretched to buoyant, and she wishes she could regain her apathy from the past year. Liddy wonders if Bathsheba could elope with Boldwood, but Bathsheba says severely that if she marries, many years from now, it will be for reasons few know.

Throughout these chapters, the point of view switches rapidly back and forth between the different characters, all preparing for the climactic scene at Boldwood's party. Bathsheba had thought she'd moved from emotion to indifference, but now knows she's not yet exempt from these swings.

Boldwood tells Gabriel that his share in the farm is much too small: he wants to increase the proportion, so that he can retire altogether eventually. If he marries Bathsheba, he adds—but Gabriel interrupts him and says not to speak of it yet. Boldwood says he's come to understand that Gabriel has feelings for her too, but he admires Gabriel's restraint, so he'd like to show his gratefulness and friendship. Gabriel leaves him uneasily, realizing that this passion has affected his reason.

Boldwood is increasingly confident that Bathsheba will agree to marry him, so much so that he's willing to make plans for the future that involve specific economic decisions. Boldwood may understand that part of Gabriel's unease comes from his feelings for Bathsheba, but not that he's also uneasy about Boldwood's own confidence.

Boldwood goes into his closet and opens a small circular case inside, gazing at the diamond ring within it. His butler calls to say that guests are arriving.

More proof of Boldwood's renewed pride and confidence at Bathsheba's answer.

Troy buttons up his overcoat: he's made up his mind to go to the party. Pennyways asks why he doesn't bide his time and write to Bathsheba, but Troy says he shouldn't have to wait to reclaim what's his. The bailiff thinks he should go abroad again rather than stir up such trouble, but Troy laughs off any danger. Pennyways realizes that he'll need her good opinion again if she's back with Troy: he declares that he does think her a good woman, though one can never tell from the outside. It's 6:30, and Troy says he must go.

Troy too prepares to attend Boldwood party, an impulsive decision that clashes to a certain extent with his conniving ways. Indeed, Pennyways isn't sure this is a good idea, probably in part given his own history, but Troy's insistence on claiming his "property" overrides any other objections.

CHAPTER 53

Outside Boldwood's house, a few men are whispering about Troy being seen in Casterbridge that afternoon. One, Sam Samway, says that means mischief: he pities the girl. Another says such an independent, strong-willed woman should never have married him: it almost serves her right. But others disagree.

As is often the case, news and gossip—even information that is of personal, private interest to Bathsheba—reach others in the village before they reach her.

William Smallbury walks up to the group in the darkness and hears the tale. Laban Tall also arrives, and says they should keep quiet, as if it's false it will unnecessarily worry Bathsheba, and if it's true it won't do any good to tell her in advance. She's only ever been fair and true to him: another agrees that she never tells "women's little lies."

The chorus of voices at Warren's Malt-house has moved temporarily to the darkness outside Boldwood's house, where Bathsheba's character and situation are once again discussed and dissected at length.

Boldwood can be seen walking down the path, and the men stand still: they can hear him speaking softly to himself, hoping to God that she'll come. Suddenly Bathsheba does arrive, and he welcomes her as she apologizes for being late. As they go inside, one of the men remarks that he didn't know it was like that between the two. Another says uneasily that they should have made the report, but it's no use now.

This chorus of men is also witness to Boldwood's private drama and his own personal desires. This group can already foretell the danger that threatens to interrupt the evening, especially if Bathsheba agrees to marry Boldwood, now that her husband is known to be alive.

Samway, Tall, and Smallbury go out to the gate, deciding to go to Warren's instead of inside. As they approach the tavern, Smallbury points into the windowpane: Troy's face peers in, listening to Gabriel and the maltster talking about Boldwood's party and his love of Bathsheba. The men withdraw back to the house, and decide someone should alert Bathsheba. It's decided that Tall will. He goes inside, but soon appears again, abashed, saying that the mood is somehow dispirited, and he hates to cast a further pall over it. Samway suggests they all go in together.

As the group returns to their regular spot—too uneasy to join the festivities—the men are also privy to new information, the fact that Troy now is aware of Boldwood's feelings for Bathsheba. Still, while the men are skilled at discussing all the gossip around town, they're evidently not quite adept at turning such knowledge into action that will help someone.

Inside, Bathsheba has resolved not to dance or sing, though it would have been unkind not to come at all. After an hour, she decides she can leave, and she goes into the parlor. But then Boldwood enters, saying he's been meaning to speak to her: she knows perhaps why. Does she give the promise? he asks. She says she does feel she owes the promise, though she is unhappy. He adds that she's beautiful, though this honest remark has little effect on her now. In a flat voice, she says she has no feeling at all on the subject, but she will give her promise as the rendering of a debt. He asks her to name the date. But she lashes out, saying she wants to be just without wronging herself, and that there's still a shadow of doubt as to Troy's death. Let her ask a solicitor, she begs him.

Bathsheba is still trying to balance her requirements as a widow in mourning with the knowledge of Boldwood's expectations, as well as her suspicions of his disturbed mental state. Finally she is unable to avoid him any more, having hoped that she might be able to make an appearance at his party without her private drama coming to a head. Boldwood's earlier mistake, contrasted with Troy's behavior, had been never to tell Bathsheba she was beautiful: now, though, she's changed, and such a declaration has little effect.

Boldwood, in turn, begs her to promise marriage after six years: he deserves it, for loving her more than anyone. Sobbing, Bathsheba asks him not to press her more if she agrees: he says yes, he'll leave it to time. Solemnly, she says she'll marry him in six years to the day. Boldwood asks her to wear the ring he draws out, but she exclaims that no one can know they are engaged—he must not insist, she says, stamping her foot. Quietly, now, he says it's simply a pledge. She says it's too wild a scheme: she can't wear it. But finally she agrees to wear it only for that night. Boldwood leaves her alone.

Boldwood's behavior becomes increasingly violent and unrelenting—it almost doesn't seem to matter to him whether or not Bathsheba really loves him or even wants to marry at all, as long as he can get what he wants. Bathsheba, in turn, is devastated by the tragic, dramatic climax of what began as a silly, thoughtless affair. She's tried to atone for it, and yet her penance continues to be drawn out.

Boldwood now gazes into the fire, when at once he notices a few concerned whispers from the working men. He asks what's wrong, and orders Samway to tell him. Samway tells Tall he should alert Bathsheba now. Boldwood asks Bathsheba if she knows what they mean: she doesn't. Then, a man at the door says a stranger is wanted for Mrs. Troy: he opens the door, and Troy stands in the doorway. In silence, those who had heard the news recognized him; no one else does. But Bathsheba grows pale and clutches the railing.

Other guests, now, seem to have learned the gossip about Troy's presence in Weatherbury. Only Bathsheba and Boldwood remain ignorant. In a dramatic moment, the open doors frames the figure of the husband Bathsheba had thought dead: Bathsheba recognizes him even if few other people, including Boldwood, do.

Boldwood doesn't recognize Troy, and invites him in cheerily. Troy takes off his cap and looks Boldwood in the face: he begins to laugh mechanically, and Boldwood finally does recognize him. Troy turns to Bathsheba, who has sunk to the lowest stair, her eyes fixed vacantly on him, and says he's come here for her: she must come home with him.

The drama is undercut by Boldwood's light, jovial attitude—but that tragicomic element is elevated anew once Boldwood, too, recognizes Troy, who is now triumphantly able to claim what he thinks of (and what society considers to be) his property.

At first Bathsheba doesn't move; when Troy repeats his order, Boldwood tells her to go with her husband. Still she doesn't move: she is frozen in place, but shrinks back when Troy stretches out his hand. Irritated, he seizes her arm and she screams. Suddenly the oak partition shakes and the room fills with smoke. Everyone turns to Boldwood, who was standing in front of a gun case. When Bathsheba had cried out a Boldwood had seized one of the guns, cocked it, and shot at Troy, who fell. Troy sighs, contracts, and then lies still.

Initially Bathsheba, who has suffered a wide swath of emotions tonight, finds herself unable to react to this new addition. It's the touch of her husband that rouses her from her frozen state, but it's also her scream that triggers the moment of climax in the book, as Boldwood makes one final defense of Bathsheba and all-too-violent declaration of his love for her.

Boldwood, meanwhile, is trying to turn the gun on himself. Samway sees this, darts up to him, and manages to turn the gun so that it discharges into the ceiling. Boldwood gasps that there's another way for him to die. He kisses Bathsheba's hand, then opens the door and leaves.

Boldwood doesn't manage to kill himself in turn, but he does on some level recognize that this was his final sacrifice, and that he can't expect a future with Bathsheba now.

CHAPTER 54

Boldwood turns towards Casterbridge and descends into the town. He stops in front of the entrance to the jail, pulls the bell, and speaks in a low voice to the porter. He enters and the door closes behind him.

Boldwood expects that he'll face death another way, by handing himself over to the authorities as a murderer.

Gabriel is one of the first to hear, and rushes to Boldwood's house, where all the women are huddled against the walls like **sheep** in a storm. Bathsheba is sitting beside Troy's body, his head in her lap, clasping one of his hands: she's become herself again, the calm, cool personality of a great man's mother. She says automatically to Gabriel that he must ride to a surgeon, though it's useless. Barely understanding, Gabriel leaves and is half a mile away before realizing he should have stayed and sent another man. What had become of Boldwood? he wonders, and how had Troy reappeared? He passes a pedestrian about three miles from Casterbridge going in the same direction, but pays little heed.

Gabriel has been at Warren's Malt-house all this time, having refused to attend Boldwood's party, but as he arrives, Bathsheba seems to have regained her prior coolness and authority—even if the narrator describes this authority not by characterizing Bathsheba as a great woman herself, but as the kind of woman who would be the mother of a great man. It's implied that the figure Gabriel passes may be Boldwood himself, on his way to Casterbridge to hand himself in at the jail.

The surgeon, Mr. Granthead, meets Liddy as he reaches the house. She tells him that Bathsheba locked herself in the room with Troy, wanting to know only when Gabriel or Mr. Thirdly arrived. These two enter at the same moment, and they all go upstairs. Bathsheba looks calm and rigid, but is grateful that they have come. She has lit candles around the corpse. The doctor enters and then returns to the hall, where he says that the body has been properly undressed and put in grave clothes: the women must have a stoic's nerve. She says it's simply a wife's solicitude, and then, suddenly exhausted, sinks to the floor. That night Liddy keeps watch as Bathsheba moans that it's all her fault.

Bathsheba knows now more than ever that she alone must bear responsibility for what has happened, only imagining that she might alleviate her isolation either through the doctor's help or the presence of her friend and confidant, Gabriel. Bathsheba enacts some of the same mourning rituals that she did at Fanny's death; indeed, part of what the doctor calls her stoicism stems from the fact that she has in some ways lived out this grieving process before, as well as the sense of guilt.

CHAPTER 55

It's now the month of March, and on Yalbury Hill between Weatherbury and Casterbridge, a number of men are gathered, including Poorgrass, Coggan, and Cain Ball. After a half hour's wait, a judge arrives on a travelling carriage: the men return home. Coggan and Poorgrass discuss the judge's face, and say they hope for the best. They all await the news anxiously.

Time passes and the guilt and penance of another character, Boldwood, are now up for question, as the men who witness so much that happens in Weatherbury first await the news .

All knew that Boldwood was in strange moods that fall, but few other than Bathsheba and Troy suspected his full mental state. In his closet had been discovered several expensive lady's dresses, muffs, and jewelry cases, each labeled with Bathsheba's name and a date six years in a future. The farmhands are discussing this at Warren's Malt-house when Gabriel returns, saying that Boldwood had pled guilty, and had been sentenced to death.

Bathsheba had feared Boldwood would go mad if she didn't agree to marry him, but here the narrator suggests that Troy too manipulated Boldwood's mental state, and perhaps also caused it to worsen, by the tricks he played just after his marriage—tricks that, one might say, ultimately caused his own downfall.

All at Weatherbury, though, feel that Boldwood isn't morally responsible for his acts—introducing as their own proof his neglect of the cornstacks the summer before. They address a petition to the Home Secretary asking for reconsideration. The execution had been fixed for Saturday morning two weeks after the sentence. On Friday afternoon, Gabriel returns from the jail, where he'd been to wish Boldwood goodbye. Looking back, he sees carpenters lifting a post. When he returns, half the village meets him, but he says there's no tidings, and no hope.

Gabriel, in turn, had known something was awry in Boldwood as a result of his neglect of farming: unlike the other characters, he could not separate his personal conflicts and dramas from the necessities of daily life in the country. Gabriel finds himself still bound to Boldwood, not only because he is his master but also because of the history they share.

Bathsheba is at home, and keeps asking for news, but Gabriel decides not to bother her yet. He asks Tall to ride to town late tonight and wait, just in case. Liddy says the mistress will go out of her mind, too, if he's not saved. That night Tall leaves, and many wait for him on the Casterbridge road. Finally he returns, and announces Boldwood is not to die: confinement will be his punishment.

Boldwood believed that he would find another way to die if he didn't manage to kill himself. While the lessening of his sentence is, according to Liddy, enough to keep Bathsheba sane, it is not exactly a diminution of the tragedy.

CHAPTER 56

With the spring, Bathsheba begins to recover, though she continues to prefer solitude. She does spend more time outside as the summer goes on. One evening in August she enters the orchard for the first time since Christmas. She hears singing from the church and goes into the graveyard, where she reads Fanny's tombstone, then the new letters below it saying that the remain of Francis Troy lie in the same grave.

As the seasons change and the requirements of farm life shift in turn, Bathsheba too begins to emerge from the climactic horror and tragedy of the Christmas before. Still, her mourning and sense of guilt continue, leading her on a kind of shortened pilgrimage to visit the graves.

Bathsheba listens to the hymn from inside, where the choir is practicing. It's a somber one, about light leading one on amid gloom. She begins to cry, wishing she could be innocent like the children. Grief, though, now seems to her more of a luxury than a punishment. After some time, she lifts her head to see Gabriel, who respectfully says he was about to enter: he's one of the bass singers.

The songs sung within the church reflect Bathsheba's own mood, though potentially also a sense of greater hopefulness than she currently feels. Circumstance, meanwhile, intervenes to thrust her together with Gabriel once again.

Gabriel doesn't want to drive Bathsheba away: he thinks he won't go in tonight. They stand, embarrassed, and finally he says he hasn't seen her for so long. At first he avoids speaking to her about the tragedy, but she says he need not. They stand by the grave. Then, hesitating, he says that he's been meaning to ask her about a business matter. He's thinking of leaving England next spring. Surprised and disappointed, she asks why and where: Gabriel stammers that he's thought of California, and that he has reasons to decline to manage Boldwood's farm.

The easy conversation that Gabriel and Bathsheba have mostly enjoyed has been compromised by Bathsheba's long grief and solitude. She still, though, evidently cares for Gabriel (perhaps more than she admits to herself), enough that learning of his decision to leave, despite the fact that she hasn't seen him in so long, is painful to her.

Bathsheba cries that she can't do without Gabriel, who has been with her for so long: it seems almost unkind for him to leave when she's so helpless. But Gabriel says that's why he feels obliged to go. Anxiously, he leaves. Now Bathsheba is troubled in a new way, pained that the one person who's always remained on her side is now abandoning her.

Bathsheba has, in the past, taken pride in her independence and ability to manage things on her own. All the while, however, Gabriel has prevented her from complete isolation, both in helping her materially and serving as a friend.

As the weeks go on, Gabriel's lack of interest in her or her affairs becomes more evident: he is avoiding her, making her feel like he despises her. Christmas arrives, the anniversary of her widowhood. As she leaves church, she hopes to cross his path—she had heard his bass voice from the overhead gallery—but as he comes up the path he looks aside, and vanishes.

As Bathsheba comes to terms with Gabriel's decision to leave her, the indifferent way he evidently feels towards her becomes increasingly painful, and even perhaps a sign of a negative feeling stronger than indifference.

The next day Bathsheba receives a formal letter from Gabriel saying he will be gone by Lady Day. She sits and cries bitterly, wounded at the withdrawal of his love for her and bewildered at having to regain the energy to survive on her own, at going back to the market, even, which he's done since Troy's death.

Bathsheba's bitterness also stems from the coldness shown by Gabriel, who wrote a formal letter rather than going to speak with her, as well as from the isolation and fragility she feels even more now.

After dinner, Bathsheba goes down to Gabriel's house and asks to speak with him. Awkwardly, he says he doesn't have proper accommodation for a lady: she doesn't mind the wood seats of his chair, but can't escape a discomfort that they've never had between them before. She stammers that she feels she's offended him, and couldn't let him leave on that account. He tells her that's not the case—in fact, he's not going to emigrate, only take over the Lower Farm.

Finally Bathsheba decides to compromise her pride and go talk to Gabriel herself, even though their meeting at his house underlines once again the gulf in social and economic status that cropped up between them after Gabriel lost everything and Bathsheba inherited her uncle's farm.

Gabriel adds that he would continue to watch over Bathsheba's farm, were it not for what's being said about them. Bathsheba says he must tell her: it's that he has been waiting around with the idea of "getting" Bathsheba, that is of marrying her. Bathsheba looks alarmed: she begins to say it would be absurd, but quickly interrupts herself to say "too soon" to think of that. Gabriel agrees that it's "too absurd," though Bathsheba stammers that she said too soon. He corrects her, but with tears in her eyes, she insists she didn't say that—he must believe her.

Like Bathsheba, Gabriel too is acutely aware that little news escapes the gossip mill centered around Warren's Malt-house: he's most concerned, though, to maintain Bathsheba's own reputation, as well as both of their sense of pride. Meanwhile, Gabriel reminds Bathsheba implicitly that she knows how far apart they are in status, a recognition revealed by what she almost said.

Gabriel looks into Bathsheba's face, with tender surprise, and says if he only knew whether he might marry her after all. But she says he never asks—and he ought not to have sent that harsh, cruel letter. Laughing, now, Gabriel says that as an unmarried man managing her affairs he had to watch over his position, especially since people knew how he felt about her—it hasn't been easy. Bathsheba cries, rising from her seat, that she's glad she came, though she cries that it's as if she'd come to court him, a dreadful thought. Gabriel accompanies her home and they speak little of their feelings: their affection doesn't need pretty phrases. Instead it is the relationship that comes from knowing each other's worse aspects first, and better character only later: a true camaraderie, the only love as strong as death, and much stronger than passion.

For the first time since he last proposed to Bathsheba, Gabriel again brings up the possibility of marrying her, and again refers to his feelings for her. It now seems that this is what Bathsheba has been waiting for all the while—even if her "dreadful thought" acknowledges the inescapable social and economic gap between them. Nonetheless, the book suggests that complete, profound knowledge of another person, with all his or her faults and personal history, can be enough to supersede such differences, perhaps even allowing for an end to guilt and penance.

CHAPTER 57

Bathsheba tells Gabriel that she wants only a private, secret, plain wedding. A few nights later, then, he sneaks out to fetch a license, and meets Coggan, whom he decides to trust with the secret that he and Bathsheba are getting married the next morning. He wouldn't have wanted secrecy, but circumstances make a loud wedding inappropriate. Bathsheba doesn't want the whole parish ogling her.

Although Gabriel would prefer another kind of wedding, he continues to put Bathsheba's wishes above his own: knowing her as well as he does, he recognizes her aversion to local gossip, something that as mistress of the farm she has constantly had to battle.

Coggan says that the wife of Laban Tall, who's the new clerk of the parish, will spread the news around everywhere before morning. He says that he'll ask to speak to Laban outside the door—his wife will never guess. But Tall isn't at home, so Coggan makes up a story about a farm share agreement, saying it's vital that he must come to the church the next morning.

Coggan, too, knows that news travels quickly in Weatherbury—especially when Susan Tall, Laban Tall's wife, is concerned. Coggan's plan functions as another comic touch within a more serious romantic mode.

Bathsheba, meanwhile, can't sleep past four, and finally fetches Liddy at six to give her hair a brushing. Only then does she tell Liddy that Farmer Gabriel is coming to dine today. When Liddy is dubious about the morals of that, Bathsheba whispers the news to her, and Liddy exclaims in joy. Near ten, Gabriel knocks on Bathsheba's door, and the two move through the mist and fog with umbrellas to the church yard, arm in arm for the first time in their lives. In the church are Tall, Liddy, and the parson, and the deed is soon accomplished.

Bathsheba doesn't share the news of her wedding even with Liddy until the last moment—after so much pain and suffering, Liddy now has a chance to rejoice at a piece of information from her mistress. The wedding contrasts sharply to the drunken harvest supper over which Troy reigned, and indeed given all that she's experienced, Bathsheba doesn't feel like she has the right to such celebration.

That evening the couple sits down to tea in Bathsheba's parlor, where they've decided to live. Just then they hear a cannon and trumpets: they go to the porch and hear a great clang of instruments: Mark Clark and Jan Coggan have enlisted the village to perform. Clark wishes long life to the couple, and Gabriel thanks them. The others tease him for the naturalness with which he says, "my wife," though they say it needs to be a little chillier—that will come with joy. Bathsheba doesn't laugh much anymore, but she smiles, and Poorgrass cheerfully makes a gloss on the affair.

Bathsheba continues to want to pay the price for her actions, refusing grand ceremonies and celebrations: the story's happy ending is mitigated to a certain extent by the deaths that will continue to hang over her head, not to mention Boldwood's lifelong imprisonment. But the villagers' joviality allows the book to end on an upward, more comic bent, reflecting the dual tragic and comic bent of the novel.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Baena, Victoria. "*Far From the Madding Crowd*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 9 Feb 2017. Web. 27 Dec 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Baena, Victoria. "*Far From the Madding Crowd*." LitCharts LLC, February 9, 2017. Retrieved December 27, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/far-from-the-madding-crowd.

To cite any of the quotes from *Far From the Madding Crowd* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Hardy, Thomas. Far From the Madding Crowd. Penguin Classics. 2003.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Hardy, Thomas. Far From the Madding Crowd. New York: Penguin Classics. 2003.