

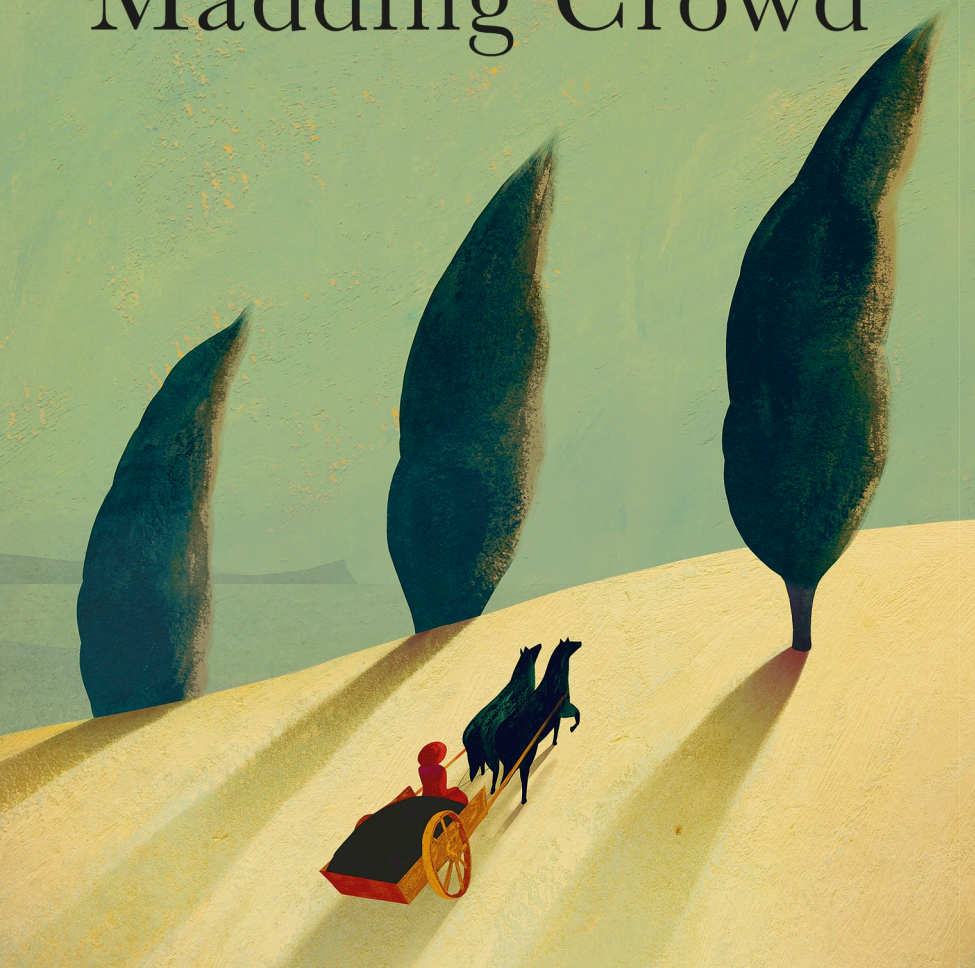
Penguin



Readers

Thomas **HARDY**

Far from the
Madding Crowd



Contents

Note about the story	4
Before-reading questions	5
Chapter One – The girl with dark hair	6
Chapter Two – A terrible event	12
Chapter Three – A new job for Gabriel	18
Chapter Four – The Valentine	24
Chapter Five – The sick sheep	30
Chapter Six – A strange meeting	36
Chapter Seven – Bathsheba in love	40
Chapter Eight – The thief in the night	46
Chapter Nine – The storm	51
Chapter Ten – The woman on the road	58
Chapter Eleven – Fanny's last journey	63
Chapter Twelve – Troy goes for a swim	68
Chapter Thirteen – Boldwood begins to hope	73
Chapter Fourteen – The Christmas party	79
During-reading questions	85
After-reading questions	87
Exercises	88
Project work	92
Glossary	93

CHAPTER ONE

The girl with dark hair

One sunny December morning, Farmer Gabriel Oak was walking across one of his fields. He was a tall young man, twenty-eight years old, and not married. He worked hard six days a week, so he usually wore ordinary working clothes. But on Sundays, he put on his best clothes and went to church. He was neither handsome nor ugly, but when he smiled, it lit up his face like the rising sun.

The field went down to a small hill called Norcombe Hill. There was a **hedge** at the bottom of the field with a road on the other side. Gabriel looked over the hedge and saw two horses pulling a yellow **waggon** coming down the hill. It was carrying tables and chairs, a sofa and pots of plants and flowers. There was a bird in a **cage** and a cat in a basket. On top of the waggon sat a girl who was young and good-looking, with dark hair and a red jacket. The waggon stopped on the other side of the hedge, just below Gabriel. The waggoner – the driver of the waggon – jumped down to the ground.

“We’ve lost a bit from the back of the waggon, Miss,” said the waggoner.

“I heard something fall as we were coming up the hill,” said the girl. “But I didn’t know what it was.”

“I’ll run back and get it,” said the waggoner.

He went away, and the girl sat and waited. She kept

looking down at a box on the floor. Then she picked it up, took out a mirror and looked at herself carefully. It was a beautiful morning and the sunlight fell softly on her red jacket and dark hair. The girl smiled a little smile. Then she heard the waggoner coming back, and quickly put the mirror back in the box.

The waggon continued on its way, and Gabriel climbed down into the road and followed it. Near the bottom of the hill was a toll gate. Gabriel heard the gatekeeper arguing with the waggoner.



“You can’t pass unless you pay more money,” said the gatekeeper.

“That young lady’s aunt is my employer,” said the waggoner. “She says she’s paid enough, and she won’t pay any more.”

“Then that young lady can’t pass,” said the gatekeeper, and closed the gate.

Gabriel walked forwards and gave the extra money to the gatekeeper. “Here,” he said. “Let the young woman pass.” He looked up at the girl and she looked at him, but she did not thank him. “Drive on!” she said to the waggoner.

The gatekeeper looked after the waggon as it drove away. “That’s a good-looking girl,” he said.

“Yes,” said Gabriel, “but she’s very vain – she knows that she’s good-looking.”

A few days later, it was the shortest day in the year. It was just after midnight, and the winter sky was full of **stars**. The weather had changed and it was cold and windy. There was a **shepherd’s hut** on Norcombe Hill, and from the hut came the sound of music. Gabriel was playing the **flute**. He was staying in the hut because it was the time of year when the sheep had their **lambs**. He wanted to be near them so that he could help them.

Gabriel had worked with sheep all of his life. His father had been a shepherd and, as a child, Gabriel had helped him. Later, he had worked as a shepherd, too, and then, for a short time, as a farm manager. Now he had enough

to rent a small farm and become a sheep farmer himself. He had just bought 200 sheep, but he had not paid all the money for them yet.

Gabriel came out of the hut carrying a lamp. He went around the field, checking to see if his sheep were all right. He returned to the hut carrying a little lamb in his arms. Gabriel put it in front of the **stove** to get warm and, after a time, it began to cry. Gabriel put on his hat and took the lamb back outside again. He put it safely beside its mother; then he looked up at the night sky. He knew how to tell the time by the position of the stars.

“One o’clock,” he thought. Suddenly, he saw a light coming from a small hut on the other side of the field. He walked across the field and looked into the hut through a small hole in its side. There were two women and two cows inside. One of the women was young and the other was older. But the younger woman’s head was turned away, so that Gabriel could not see her face.

“We can go home now,” said the older woman. “The sick cow will be all right.”

“I’ve lost my hat,” said the younger woman. “I think it fell off near the hedge.”

“We’ll have to get more food for the cows,” said the older woman.

“Don’t worry, aunt,” said the younger woman. “I’ll ride and get it as soon as it gets light.”

Just then, she turned her head and Gabriel saw her face. It was the same girl that he had seen on the waggon a few

days before. The two women left, and Gabriel went back to his hut. The next morning, he looked for her hat and found it among some leaves. Then he heard a horse, and saw the girl coming up the road with a large bag. She rode to the hut and went inside to feed the cows. Gabriel stood and waited for her to come out again.

"I found a hat," he said.

"It's mine," said the girl. "I lost it last night."

"Was it at one o'clock this morning?" asked Gabriel.

"Yes," said the girl in surprise. "How did you know?"

"I was here," replied Gabriel.

"Oh," said the girl. "You're Farmer Oak, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Gabriel. "I'm new to this area." Suddenly, he felt shy and looked down at the ground. When he looked up again, the girl had got on her horse and was riding away.

Five days passed. Gabriel often saw the young woman going to the cow hut but she never looked at him.

One afternoon, when he came back to the shepherd's hut, it was very cold inside. He closed the door and lit the stove. He felt very tired and he had a headache. He sat down and immediately fell asleep. Suddenly, he woke up. His face and neck were wet, and the girl from the waggon was beside him.

"What happened?" asked Gabriel in surprise.

"You went to sleep, but you forgot to open an air hole," said the girl. "Your dog was making a lot of noise, then he came and pulled at my skirt. I came to your hut and

saw that the air holes were closed. I opened the door, and saw you. I was afraid you might be dead. I didn't have any water, so I threw some milk over you."

There were two round holes in the walls of the hut which allowed air to enter it. Each hole could be opened and closed by moving a piece of wood across it. But if the stove was lit, one of the holes had to be open. If air could not enter the hut, a person inside could not breathe. But Gabriel had been too tired to open a hole.

"How can I thank you, Miss?" said Gabriel. "I'm sorry, I don't know your name. What is it?"

"I don't really want to tell you my name," said the girl. "You can ask my aunt – she will tell you."

"Please give me your hand," said Gabriel. He held it for a long time. "Your hand is very soft," he said.

The girl took her hand away. "Now **find out** my name," she said.