Far from the Madding Crowd [1874] by Thomas Hardy

Session 2, November 2025 - Points to Ponder

1. **How does Hardy present Bathsheba Everdene's sending of the Valentine to Farmer Boldwood?**
   Think about her age, her motives, Liddy's part in the escapade and the character of Farmer Boldwood. You might also like to consider the language Hardy uses such as Bathsheba's comment -"Let's toss as men do,". How does this manipulate the reader's view of the incident?

2. **What is the importance of this incident to the rest of the narrative?**

3. **Consider the sheep dipping incident in Chapter 19 of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and the descriptions of country life from Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* [some examples can be seen in the extracts below]. How is the rural farm presented? What are the similarities and difference in the presentation of farming, farmers and country life in general?**

So I led the way into the kitchen-garden. It was in the first promise of a summer profuse in vegetables and fruits. Perhaps it was not so much cared for as other parts of the property; but it was more attended to than most kitchen-gardens belonging to farm-houses. There were borders of flowers along each side of the gravel walks; and there was an old sheltering wall on the north side covered with tolerably choice fruit-trees; there was a slope down to the fish-pond at the end, where there were great strawberry-beds; and raspberry-bushes and rose-bushes grew wherever there was a space; it seemed a chance which had been planted. Long rows of peas stretched at right angles from the main walk, and I saw Phillis stooping down among them, before she saw us. As soon as she heard our cranching steps on the gravel, she stood up, and shading her eyes from the sun, recognized us. She was quite still for a moment, and then came slowly towards us, blushing a little from evident shyness. I had never seen Phillis shy before.

Of course this led to greater facility of intercourse with the Hope Farm people. We could easily walk out there after our day's work was done, and spend a balmy evening hour or two, and yet return before the summer's twilight had quite faded away. Many a time, indeed, we would fain have stayed longer—the open air, the fresh and pleasant country, made so agreeable a contrast to the close, hot town lodgings which I shared with Mr Holdsworth; but early hours, both at eve and morn, were an imperative necessity with the minister, and he made no scruple at turning either or both of us out of the house directly after evening prayer, or "exercise", as he called it. The remembrance of many a happy day, and of several little scenes, comes back upon me as I think of that summer. They rise like pictures to my memory, and in this way I can date their succession; for I know that corn harvest must have come after hay-making, apple-gathering after corn-harvest.

Betty and the men were in the field helping with the last load of hay, for the minister said there would be rain before the morning. Yes, and the minister himself, and Phillis, and Mr Holdsworth, were all there helping. She thought that she herself could have done something; but perhaps she was the least fit for hay-making of any one; and somebody must stay at home and take care of the house, there were so many tramps about; if I had not had something to do with the railroad she would have called them navvies. I asked her if she minded being left alone, as I should like to go and help; and having her full and glad permission to leave her alone, I went off, following her directions: through the farmyard, past the cattle-pond, into the ashfield, beyond into the higher field with two holly-bushes in the middle. I arrived there: there was Betty with all the farming men, and a cleared field, and a heavily laden cart; one man at the top of the great pile ready to catch the fragrant hay which the others threw up to him with their pitchforks; a little heap of cast-off clothes in a corner of the field (for the heat, even at seven o"clock, was insufferable), a few cans and baskets, and Rover lying by them

panting, and keeping watch. Plenty of loud, hearty, cheerful talking; but no minister, no Phillis, no Mr Holdsworth. Betty saw me first, and understanding who it was that I was in search of, she came towards me.

The ways of life were too simple at the Hope Farm for my coming to them to make the slightest disturbance. I knew my room, like a son of the house. I knew the regular course of their days, and that I was expected to fall into it, like one of the family. Deep summer peace brooded over the place; the warm golden air was filled with the murmur of insects near at hand, the more distant sound of voices out in the fields, the clear faraway rumble of carts over the stone-paved lanes miles away. The heat was too great for the birds to be singing; only now and then one might hear the wood-pigeons in the trees beyond the Ashfield. The cattle stood knee-deep in the pond, flicking their tails about to keep off the flies. The minister stood in the hay-field, without hat or cravat, coat or waistcoat, panting and smiling. Phillis had been leading the row of farm-servants, turning the swathes of fragrant hay with measured movement. She went to the end—to the hedge, and then, throwing down her rake, she came to me with her free sisterly welcome. "Go, Paul!" said the minister. "We need all hands to make use of the sunshine to-day. 'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.' It will be a healthy change of work for thee, lad; and I find best rest in change of work." So off I went, a willing labourer, following Phillis's lead; it was the primitive distinction of rank; the boy who frightened the sparrows off the fruit was the last in our rear. We did not leave off till the red sun was gone down behind the fir-trees bordering the common. Then we went home to supper—prayers—to bed; some bird singing far into the night, as I heard it through my open window, and the poultry beginning their clatter and cackle in the earliest morning. I had carried what luggage I immediately needed with me from my lodgings and the rest was to be sent by the carrier. He brought it to the farm betimes that morning, and along with it he brought a letter or two that had arrived since I had left. I was talking to cousin Holman—about my mother's ways of making bread, I remember; cousin Holman was questioning me, and had got me far beyond my depth—in the house-place, when the letters were brought in by one of the men, and I had to pay the carrier for his trouble before I could look at them. A bill—a Canadian letter! What instinct made me so thankful that I was alone with my dear unobservant cousin? What made me hurry them away into my coat-pocket? I do not know. I felt strange and sick, and made irrelevant answers, I am afraid. Then I went to my room, ostensibly to carry up my boxes. I sate on the side of my bed and opened my letter from Holdsworth.

4. **How does Hardy present Sergeant Troy? What impression of his character do we get from this presentation?**
5. **What is the role of Fanny Robbins in the narrative? How important do you consider her to be? Think about whether your view of her changes as the novel progresses.**
6. **What is the importance of the Great Barn? What does this chapter tell us about country life?**
7. **How does Hardy present Boldwood?**
8. **What are the positive and negative characteristic of the three contenders for Bathsheba's hand?**
9. **What ideas do you have about the progress of the story by the end of this section (Ch 24)**