

The story resumes in February, in the town of Casterbridge, where a gathering is taking place for men looking for work to meet with prospective employers. After he discreetly slips out of the wagon, Gabriel notices that some crops of straw are on fire at a nearby farm and that the fire is threatening to spread. Hoping to take advantage of this gratitude, Gabriel goes to ask if the farmer would like to hire him as a shepherd, only to realize that the owner of the farm is Bathsheba, who has inherited it from her uncle. Gabriel joins in to help the farmworkers control the fire, taking charge of the situation and providing effective leadership.