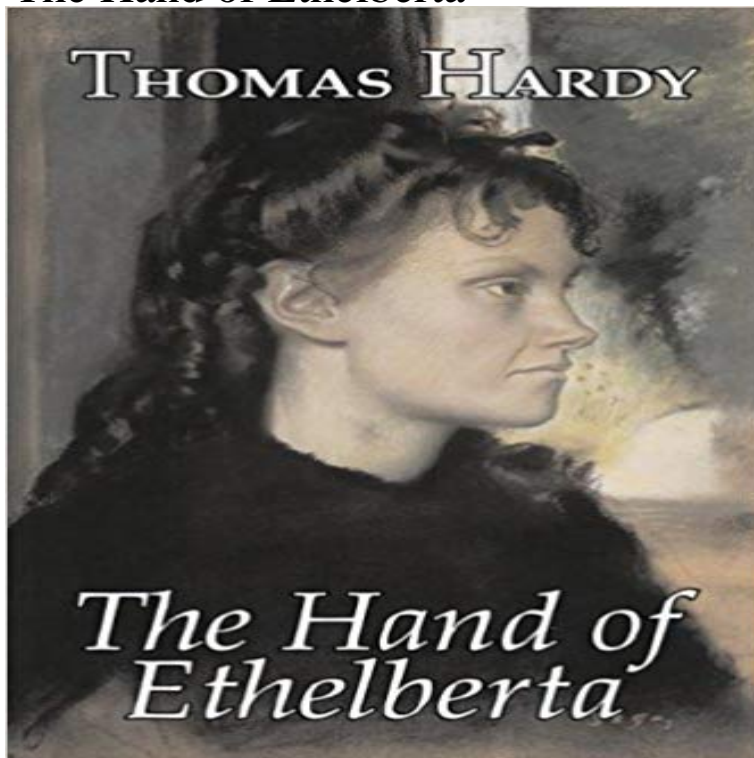


## The Hand of Ethelberta



Thomas Hardy was an English novelist, short-story writer, and poet. He destroyed the manuscript of his first, unplaced novel, but tried again encouraged by mentor and friend George Meredith. His important work took place in an area of southern England he called Wessex, named after the English kingdom that existed before the Norman Conquest. Published after Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Hand of Ethelberta* is a change of pace using comedy and farce. As Hardy put it, This Somewhat Frivolous narrative was produced as an interlude between stories of a more sober design, and it was given the subtitle of a comedy to indicate -- though not quite accurately -- the aim of the performance. Ethelberta Chickerel is the daughter of a lady's maid, who forms a liaison with a knight's son who promptly dies. His mother reconciles to Ethelberta, has her educated and brought into society, and then dies herself, leaving Ethelberta the townhouse and nothing else. She must make her way in the world by her wits, with the native instincts of a girl of the lower classes underlying the veneer of sophistication, as she attempts to secure her future.

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