

# **Ethan Frome Book Notes**

## **Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton**

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## Author/Context

Edith Newbold Jones Wharton was born on January 24, 1862, in high-society New York to upper-class parents, George Frederic Jones and Lucretia Stevens Rhinelander Jones. As a child and adolescent, Edith was educated at home by governesses. Having eagerly perused her family's library, she enjoyed literature and had always been interested in writing. She also accompanied her parents to various trips across the European continent: England, France, Italy and Germany. As a member of the old New York upper-class, Edith led a luxurious life, entering society at the age of seventeen.

Edith married wealthy Bostonian Edward (Teddy) Wharton, twenty years her senior, in 1885. Their marriage had been rocky from the beginning; they did not share many interests and Edward himself did little to encourage his wife's gifts of intellect and creativity. Not only did Edward embezzle Edith's trust funds to pay off his debts, he abused her trust by committing adultery (although Edith herself had an affair with Morgan Fullerton, who was a friend of hers and of her dear friend Henry James, lasting about three years). Her marriage to Edward drove Edith to depression and even led her straight to an asylum. She would later divorce Edward Wharton in 1912.

Wharton found comfort and friendship in writing and in Henry James, who advised her on her writing. Her first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), focused on the architecture and design of European homes. Then her publishing company, Scribners, published her first fiction, a collection of short stories called *The Greater Inclination* (1899). After the publication of her first book, Wharton focused on her literary career. Edith published a number of novels throughout her literary career: *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The Reef* (1912), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *The Age of Innocence* (1920), *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922), *Old New York* (1924), and *The Mother's Recompense* (1925). She published her own autobiography, *A Backward Glance* in 1934.

Wharton, living in France by this time, remained in Paris during World War I to do relief work. She was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour for her work in WWI. Then she earned an honorary D. Litt. from Yale and later the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. *The Age of Innocence* won her the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1921.

Edith Wharton continued writing up until the time of her death. Her last work, *The Buccaneers* (1938), was left unfinished until her friend finished the end. She died in her villa in France on August 11, 1937.

Today, Wharton remains one of the most prolific authors of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. She feared that the attitude of 1920's America would fall prey to the 1870's and 1880's - superficial, crude, and lost - and was able to write about New York society with a satirical eye. Best known for her depiction of Old New York in all of its social hypocrisy, Wharton portrayed New York's acceptance or defiance of traditional standards. Wharton's novels show the moral disintegration and unguided convention prevalent of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century. "Given

her love of literature, her strength of character, and her creative power, she was able to make the most of her opportunities for self-cultivation and later to contemplate, understand, and describe ironically an isolated civilization in decline and transformation: As wife and hostess, she belonged to Society." (Walton 22).

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## Plot Summary

The narrator of the novel notices a crippled, frail, sad-looking man in town, whose name is Ethan Frome. The narrator meets Ethan when the man who drives him to the local train station is unable to take him and another townsman suggests that the narrator ask Ethan to drive. Ethan has been driving the narrator back and forth for a while until one winter day, huge amounts of snow block their path. Ethan invites the narrator to his home on his farm to stay the night. At the Frome farm, the narrator then sees what makes him so miserable: the two women who live with him. One of the women, a tall, pale woman, is Zeena Frome, Ethan's wife. The other woman, who is severely crippled and paralyzed, is Mattie Silver, Zeena's cousin and Ethan's former lover. The narrator then begins to suspect the turn of events that led to the tragic fate of Ethan and Mattie.

Young Ethan Frome goes to the town dance to walk his wife's cousin, Mattie Silver, home. Ethan, Zeena, and Mattie are the only ones who occupy the Frome farm; Ethan's parents died four or five years ago. Mattie has come to Starkfield to help care for the ailing Zeena. Ethan has fallen for the sweet Mattie, so unlike the complaining and ungrateful Zeena, and is attracted to her vibrancy and emotion. Ethan is jealous of Denis Eady's attraction to Mattie, and Zeena knows it. As Ethan walks Mattie home from the dance, they pass by the hill that people sled down and they both express their desire to sled down the hill. Mattie tells him that she does not want to leave town even if Zeena wants her to go.

Zeena leaves Starkfield to see a doctor in a nearby town. Ethan makes an excuse - getting cash for the lumber they have - not to drive Zeena to the train station. After Zeena leaves, Ethan imagines what it would feel like to be married to Mattie, with just the two of them alone; This will be the first night Mattie and Ethan can be alone, without any interruptions from Zeena. Ethan recalls his mother's final illness that led to her death - Zeena had come to the Frome farm to help care for Ethan's mother, and he married her out of loneliness. Their marriage had been rocky from the beginning - mostly due to Zeena's silent and cold manner. Ethan goes to see Andrew Hale to see if Hale can give him money for the lumber, but Hale refuses.

Ethan is even more attracted to Mattie, whose appearance is heightened by the red ribbon in her hair. Mattie has prepared a warm supper for Ethan. They have a nice time until they mention Zeena's name and then Pussy, the cat, accidentally breaks Zeena's cherished pickle-dish, which they were not supposed to use without Zeena's permission. Mattie is inconsolable at the prospect of Zeena finding out about the broken dish. Ethan comes up with the idea to glue the pieces back together before Zeena can discover the broken dish.

Before Ethan can glue the broken dish back together, Zeena returns home. Zeena informs him that her doctor has told her to hire a new girl to do all the housework, for Mattie is not as efficient as Zeena wants her to be. Ethan is angered and dismayed at the thought of losing Mattie and at the thought of more unnecessary expenses for Zeena's care. Zeena, also enraged, tells him that she became sick from nursing his ill

mother. Ethan protests that he has no money to give the new girl, but Zeena asks him shrewdly about the money he supposedly received from the lumber. Ethan looks at Zeena in a new light, as she dismissively sends Mattie, her own relation, away without a care for the poor girl. Ethan tells Mattie that she must go. When Zeena discovers the broken pieces of the pickle-dish, she yells at Mattie calling her a disgrace like her father.

Ethan thinks of running away to the West with Mattie, but his obligation to Zeena prevents him from leaving her in such a terrible position. The farm does not make much money, and he would not be able to support Mattie on such a small income even if they were to leave. He feels as if he is destined to stay in Starkfield forever; escape is impossible. The next day, the day Mattie is supposed to leave, Ethan tries to ask the Hales for money, but he is unable to lie to people who are truly sympathetic to his fate.

Ethan tells Zeena that he will take Mattie to the station himself. They are very much devastated at the thought of leaving each other. They decide to take the sled ride that they used to talk about. Mattie suggests that they throw themselves in the path of the elm tree. They both agree that their lives are not worth living if they are separated. They hit the elm tree with an unexpected result: they are both severely injured, but survive the crash. Zeena takes the invalid Mattie in and cares for her; Ethan is crippled from the crash. Ethan's fate is tragic: he must live with the woman he hates, and the woman with whom he had a chance to live a happy life.

# Major Characters

**The narrator:** The narrator introduces the character of Ethan Frome into the storyline. He lives in Starkfield, Massachusetts, and is driven to the local train station every day for work and back. When his driver is unable to take him, he suggests that the narrator ask the crippled Ethan Frome to drive him to the station. Ethan is in need of money and would be willing to drive him to the station for a small wage. One snowy day, the narrator decides to stay at the Frome farm, at Ethan's invitation, on account of the huge amount of snow blocking their path. When the narrator is inside the Fromes' house, only then does he suspect what makes Ethan so miserable: the two women he must live with.

**Ethan Frome:** The protagonist of the novel, crippled and miserable. His parents' death leave Ethan with no other choice but to maintain his parents' farm in Starkfield, Massachusetts. Instead of finishing his studies as an engineer, he marries Zeena Pierce, a cousin of his mother's, who helped him care for his sick mother. When Zeena herself becomes ill, Ethan is obligated to care for her. Ethan had decided to marry Zeena out of loneliness. Later, Ethan falls in love with Zeena's cousin, Mattie. Mattie's personality is both warm and affectionate; two qualities Ethan's marriage lacks. When Zeena decides to hire another girl to help with household chores, and to throw Mattie out, Ethan tries to think of ways he could leave with her. Now that Zeena knows of his love for Mattie, he wants to be with her and leave the farm. Ethan thinks of taking Mattie and running west, but realizes that he does not have enough money to cover the travel costs. He knows that even if Zeena sold the farm, she would not earn enough to survive. Going west is only a foolish dream. On the day of Mattie's departure, Ethan takes Mattie out sledding, where they try to kill themselves. They somehow survive the crash. Ethan ends up crippled and becomes more frail, living with the invalid Mattie and the cruel and bitter Zeena, with no hope of ever regaining the days when he and Mattie were in love.

**Zenobia (Zeena) Pierce Frome:** Ethan's sickly wife. She knows about Ethan and Mattie's love for one another and suspects that Ethan wants to be with Mattie rather than her. After a trip to see Dr. Buck, Zeena decides to force Mattie to leave and bring on a new hired girl to oversee the household chores. This will ensure that Mattie and Ethan are apart. Her discovery of the broken pickle-dish gives her another reason to hate Mattie and throw her out. Mattie and Ethan's sledding crash leaves Mattie more helpless than Zeena and forces Ethan to take care of both Zeena and Mattie.

**Mattie Silver:** Zeena's cheerful, sweet cousin who comes to Starkfield to help Ethan care for Zeena. She is the daughter of a poor and disgraced father, who embarrassed the Pierce family. Always associated with the color red, she falls in love with Ethan. When Zeena deliberately hires a new girl to care for her, Mattie is forced to leave. Mattie and Ethan cannot bear to let each other go, and she tells Ethan, as they sled down a steep hill, to steer in the path of an elm tree. Rather than being killed, Ethan is crippled and Mattie ends up as an invalid with Zeena helping to care for her.



## Minor Characters

**Harmon Gow:** Harmon Gow informs the narrator of the beginning of Ethan's tragic story. He also suggests that the narrator ask Ethan to drive him to the local train station for work every day, an idea that introduces the narrator to Ethan.

**Ned Hale:** A friend of the Fromes. Ned is engaged to Ruth Varnum. Ned Hale is the son of the town builder.

**Ruth Varnum Hale (Mrs. Ned Hale):** A friend of the Fromes. Later, when she and Ned are married and she is a middle-aged woman, she recounts the fates of Ethan and Mattie after they crash into the tree to the narrator.

**Denis Eady:** Denis Eady, the son of the town grocer, likes Mattie and dances with her. He offers to walk her home. Ethan is jealous of Denis' attention to Mattie. Later, Denis drives the narrator to the local train station for work.

**Andrew Hale:** The Starkfield builder who refuses to advance Ethan fifty dollars. He asks Ethan if he is destitute and in need of money. Ethan is too proud not to take Andrew's money after that.

**Jotham Powell:** The Fromes' hired man. He is to take Mattie to the train station on the day she is forced to leave, but Ethan interferes and tells Zeena pointedly that he will take Mattie himself.

**Dr. Buck:** The doctor whom Zeena goes to see for her 'shooting pains' and who tells her to hire a new girl to do the housework.

**Mrs. Andrew Hale:** When Ethan considers asking the Hales for money again, he decides to lie, hoping that the lie he feeds them would persuade them to give him money. He talks to Mrs. Hale, who is sympathetic to Ethan's dreary and sad life, and decides not to lie to the Hales, who have been kind to them. He knows that deceiving the Hales would be wrong.



## Objects/Places

**Starkfield, Massachusetts:** The name of the town in Ethan Frome. The name of the small Massachusetts town represents a bleak, cold and dismal environment. Ethan and Mattie cannot escape their dreary life in Starkfield.

**Mattie's cherry-colored scarf:** Ethan notices the bright-colored scarf on Mattie when he sees her dancing. Mattie is always associated with the color red; he is attracted to the cheerful, lovely Mattie.

**The elm tree:** The elm tree that lies in the path of sledders on a hill. Mattie and Ethan try to kill themselves by throwing themselves in the direction of the elm tree.

**Mattie's crimson hair ribbon:** Mattie puts the ribbon in her hair on the night Zeena has gone out of town and she and Ethan are alone. Ethan is attracted to the sight of a vibrant, lively Mattie when she wears the color red.

**Zeena's pickle-dish:** The Fromes' cat, Pussy, accidentally breaks Zeena's dish that she treasures. Mattie uses it on the night Zeena is out of town to serve her and Ethan's supper. Ethan attempts to glue the dish back together, but before he can, Zeena spots the broken dish and demands to know why Mattie and Ethan used it without her permission. The pickle-dish enrages Zeena and gives her more reason to hate Mattie and Ethan.

**Ethan's study:** The small room that Ethan uses to escape the daily feelings of loneliness and the dreariness of his life with Zeena. It is a retreat for Ethan to get away from Zeena's complaints and illness, and to be by himself and enjoy his solitude.

**The sled:** The sled that Ethan and Mattie ride on the night they try to kill themselves. The sled their last hope of being together - in death.

# Quotes

Quote 1: The narrator recognizes "something bleak and unapproachable" in his face.  
Introduction, pg. 3 - 4

Quote 2: As Harmon says, "it's always Ethan done the caring." Introduction, pg. 7

Quote 3: The narrator begins to realize the significance of Harmon's words, "Guess he's been in Starkfield too many winters." Introduction, pg. 7

Quote 4: To the narrator, Ethan "seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe, with all that was warm and sentient in him fast bound below the surface...[living] in a depth of moral isolation too remote for casual access."  
Introduction, pg. 14 - 15

Quote 5: To the narrator, the "diminished dwelling [is] the image of his own shrunken body." Introduction, pg. 21

Quote 6: Ethan then asks her if she wants to leave, to which Mattie replies, "Where'd I go, if I did?" Chapter 2, pg. 49

Quote 7: Ethan usually believes that the spirits of the graveyard seem to call out to him, "We never got away - how should you?" Chapter 2, pg. 50

Quote 8: He regrets not kissing her the night before. He can still recall the day he first met her, when she had come to Starkfield, how she had been such a "colourless slip of a thing." Chapter 3, pg. 57

Quote 9: She would hardly talk to him, either because the hard farm life had taken its toll or because "Ethan never listened." Chapter 4, pg. 72

Quote 10: Ethan believes that she looks "taller, fuller, more womanly in shape and motion." Chapter 4, pg. 82

Quote 11: Zeena's response to Ethan's protests is, "She's a pauper that's hung onto us all after her father'd done his best to ruin us. I've kept her here a whole year: it's somebody else's turn now." Chapter 7, pg. 115

Quote 12: For the first time in his life he sees her in a new light: he sees her as "no longer the listless creature who had lived at his side in a state of sullen self-absorption, but a mysterious alien presence, an evil energy secreted from the long years of silent brooding...All the long misery of his baffled past, of his youth of failure, hardship and vain effort, rose up in his soul in bitterness and seemed to take shape before him in the woman who at every turn had barred his way. She had taken everything else from him; and now she meant to take the one thing that made up for all the others." Chapter 7, pg. 117 - 118



Quote 13: Ethan feels conflicted by so many confused motions in his head. "He was too young, too strong, too full of the sap of living, to submit so easily to the destruction of his hopes. Must he wear out all his years at the side of a bitter querulous woman?" Chapter 8, pg. 130-1

Quote 14: He feels as if he is a "prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished." Chapter 8, pg. 134

Quote 15: "I always tell Mr. Hale I don't know what [Zeena'd] 'a' done if she hadn't 'a' had you to look after her; and I used to say the same thing 'bout your mother. You've had an awful mean time, Ethan Frome." Chapter 8, pg. 142

Quote 16: An equally miserable Ethan tells her, "I want to put my hand out and touch you. I want to do for you and care for you. I want to be there when you're sick and when you're lonesome." Chapter 9, pg. 158 - 159

Quote 17: Hiding in the shade of the spruces, Ethan imagines that death would feel like that, as he thinks, "[I've] might have been in [our] coffins underground." Chapter 9, pg. 167

Quote 18: "There was nowhere else for [Mattie] to go," Mrs. Hale says of Mattie, "and then Ethan's face'd break your heart....When I see that, I think it's *him* that suffers most." Perilogue, pg. 179 - 180

Quote 19: Mrs. Hale speaks sadly that it might have been better if Mattie had died - for, "if she'd ha' died, Ethan might ha' lived; and the way they are now, I don't see's there's much difference between the Fromes up at the farm and the Fromes down in the graveyard' 'cept that down there they're all quiet, and the women have got to hold their tongues." Perilogue, pg. 181

# Topic Tracking: Colors

## Chapter 2

Colors 1: Ethan knows to look for Mattie's bright red scarf to find her in the crowd of people dancing. The scarf is cheerful and vibrant, characteristics that embody Mattie. He is jealous that she is dancing with Denis Eady. Ethan is very much attracted to and in love with Mattie.

Colors 2: Mattie, a vision of red with her bright red cheeks, lips, and scarf, is a deep contrast to the sullen and cold-looking Zeena. That Mattie is always associated with the color red shows that she is a passionate, animated, and emotional person, unlike Zeena, who is usually stoic and bitter. Ethan admires and loves that Mattie is such a warm and giving person.

## Chapter 3

Colors 3: Ethan remembers how pale and "colourless" Mattie had looked when she had first arrived in Starkfield. Her appearance has changed since she and Ethan began having feelings for each other; Mattie's passionate, emotional nature is what Ethan loves the most about her.

Colors 4: The contrast between Mattie and Zeena is clear when Ethan notices Zeena's appearance on the day she leaves town. Wearing a stiff brown traveling dress and an unwelcome look on her face, Zeena exudes a cold demeanor. Her face is unusually pale and blood-drawn, and the gaze on her face lets Ethan know that she suspects he does not have a valid reason to not take her to the train station.

## Chapter 4

Colors 5: When Mattie places the red ribbon in her hair, Ethan thinks that the bright color in her dark, lustrous hair gives her a more womanly and vibrant quality. The color stands out in her hair and highlights her attractive features and body. Ethan is even more attracted to the warm and passionate Mattie.

Colors 6: The cat accidentally breaks Zeena's red pickle-dish, which Mattie had gotten out from Zeena's private cabinet to use for her and Ethan's supper. The breaking of the pickle-dish parallels the breaking of Ethan and Zeena's relationship, and the disintegration of Mattie's passionate, emotional nature.

## Chapter 5

Colors 7: Ethan brings up the topic of Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum kissing, which makes Mattie blush. She and Ethan are shyly approaching the subject of their own relationship, but neither makes any move to voice their feelings. For the first time, Ethan feels that Mattie's blush guards her feelings, rather than letting him know her true thoughts. He attributes Mattie's blush to the fact that they are under Zeena's presence; she is unable

to acknowledge her true feelings. Although Zeena is not physically present, they both feel that the cold and bitter woman is there with them. That Zeena is still Ethan's wife is very much in their minds.

Colors 8: Mattie blushes again, when Ethan begs her not to mention the fact that Zeena dislikes her so much. Unlike the previous moment when he had made her blush, Mattie's blush rises slowly because of Ethan's heated insistence. Mattie distances herself from Ethan, who notices her slipping away from him and tries to comfort her.

## **Chapter 8**

Colors 9: When Mattie visits Ethan in his study, he notices that the bright red scarf, which usually adds to her cheerful nature, is unable to light up her sad face. Mattie is so distraught over Zeena discovering the broken pickle-dish and her knowledge of Ethan's and Mattie's feelings for one another that she looks pale and sallow.

## **Chapter 9**

Colors 10: Ethan recalls how pretty Mattie had looked in her pink hat during a church picnic by a lake, and he tells her so. Mattie accepts his compliment, but she also reciprocates her pleasure in receiving it. For the first time, Ethan and Mattie have acknowledged their love for one another, and their desire to be with one another.

# Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation

## Introduction

Death and Isolation 1: The narrator realizes how the harshness and the loneliness of the winter might have made poor Ethan Frome suffer so much.

Death and Isolation 2: The condition and the location of the Frome's farmhouse reveal to the narrator how isolated the Fromes (especially Ethan) are. The condition of the farm indicates to the narrator that perhaps Ethan has seen happier and better times with his family than the life he is living now.

## Chapter 2

Death and Isolation 3: The dead Frome relatives in the graveyard seem to call out to Ethan that he cannot escape the same fate: never to leave the bleak, miserable world of Starkfield. Ethan fears that he will end up like his dead relatives in the private graveyard, remaining in Starkfield, isolated from the rest of the community even in death.

Death and Isolation 4: The sight of Zeena opening the door for Ethan and Mattie horrifies Ethan. Zeena suddenly looks dark and ominous. The sudden vision of him and Zeena lying together in the graveyard frightens and disturbs Ethan. Not even the happy, satisfying dream of he and Mattie lying together in death can rejuvenate his spirits.

## Chapter 4

Death and Isolation 5: Ethan recalls the time of his father's death and his mother's illness. He had never felt such loneliness and sadness, and Zeena came to help him nurse his sick mother. Fearful of ever feeling that sad and isolated again, Ethan married Zeena out of desperation. He felt that he could not take the winter by himself, and needed someone to be with.

Death and Isolation 6: Ethan and Zeena planned to get out of Starkfield as soon as possible, but they had had no purchasers for the farm and the mill. To add to Ethan's feelings of defeat and resignation, Zeena too became ill and silent like his mother before her death. Ethan's feelings of loneliness and coldness returned.

Death and Isolation 7: As Ethan walks past the dead Ethan Frome and his wife together in the graveyard, he fears that he and Zeena will have the same fate as his dead relatives. Being married to Zeena even in death would feel like hell to Ethan; he cannot bear the thought of lying next to Zeena forever.

## Chapter 7

Death and Isolation 8: Ethan sees Zeena as a woman who is vengeful and bitter; she is cruel and heartless, intent on making Ethan and Mattie's lives horrible. He knows that



Zeena does not want he and Mattie to be together, and attempts to separate them physically. When Ethan tells Mattie that she must leave by Zeena's orders, he imagines that she is drowning and that he is dying to feel her touch. Ethan feels as if he must be near Mattie or else he or she will die.

### **Chapter 8**

Death and Isolation 9: Ethan feels frustrated and sad at the turn of events his life is taking. He is a strapping young man, ready to go out into the world, but he must remain by his sick, cruel wife's side. He feels that he is wasting his life away by being Zeena's husband and by staying in Starkfield, alone and isolated from the world.

### **Chapter 10**

Death and Isolation 10: As Ethan and Mattie scheme to kill themselves by throwing their sled into the path of the elm tree, they hide in the shade of the spruces. Ethan feels that hiding and plotting in the shade of the spruces, where no one can see them, is like death - lying underneath the ground in their coffins. Alone in their own world in the shade of the spruces, Ethan believes that this is what death is going to be like when they kill themselves.

### **Perilogue**

Death and Isolation 11: Mrs. Hale says sadly that she believes it might have been better off for Ethan if Mattie had died. As she sees it now, the sight of Ethan caring for Zeena and Mattie is heartbreaking for her. To know that Ethan and Mattie might have had a potential chance of a loving relationship is tragic, and to watch them waste their lives away in the isolated farmhouse is even more pitiful.



# Topic Tracking: Environment

## Introduction

Environment 1: The narrator realizes how lonely and isolated Ethan must feel, after having lived in Starkfield too long and experiencing too many tragedies. Ethan has not escaped the hard life living in Starkfield, and the narrator feels sorry for him.

Environment 2: Ethan embodies the somber and bleak landscape of Starkfield itself. The narrator thinks that Ethan is an extension of the forbidding landscape, hiding his true self underneath the harshness of winter.

Environment 3: The Frome farmhouse looks dilapidated and shabby, aside from being isolated from the rest of town. When Ethan regretfully tells the narrator that the house used to be larger in his father's day, the narrator gets the feeling that the house - and Ethan - must have seen better times in the past.

## Chapter 1

Environment 4: Mattie is the only person with whom Ethan can share his love and appreciation of nature. Ethan feels that their love for nature is one of the many interests that connect them. Only Mattie can take pleasure and wonder in the sight of the landscape, which pleases her as much as it does him.

## Chapter 2

Environment 5: When Ethan walks Mattie home from the dance, they pass by the big sledding hill. Ethan promises her that he will take her sledding one day, an activity that they will never forget for the rest of their lives. The sledding hill will be the ultimate factor in deciding their fate.

Environment 6: The Frome graveyard usually frightens Ethan, not because he is scared of dying, but because he fears that he will lie in the graveyard next to Zeena, the woman he does not love. Ethan used to imagine that the spirits of his deceased relatives would call out to him, "We never got away - how should you?", but now he has no fear of staying in Starkfield until death. Ethan dreams that he and Mattie will lie there.

## Chapter 4

Environment 7: After his father's death, his mother soon became ill and sick in her head, imagining that the spirits of the dead Fromes would talk to her. Ethan had become so lonely from caring for his ill parents, from being pulled from his studies, and from being isolated from the rest of town, that he was actually glad when Zeena volunteered to help him nurse his mother. He was desperate for human companionship in that cold, bleak, somber winter.





Environment 8: Although the newly married Ethan and Zeena planned to get away from Starkfield as soon as possible, Ethan could not find purchasers for the Frome farm and mill. It seemed as if he and Zeena were destined to stay in Starkfield forever; their one chance of leaving the small Massachusetts town was gone.

Environment 9: Ethan's feelings of loneliness and isolation soon began to resurface when Zeena became ill and sick in her head, falling prey to the same silence as his mother. Now that they had no way out of Starkfield, Ethan felt as if the harsh, hard world of Starkfield was drowning him. He could not leave Starkfield when Zeena was so ill; he had to stay and care for her.

Environment 10: Ethan sees one gravestone in the Frome yard that bears his name as well: Ethan Frome and his wife, married for fifty-some years. Looking at the gravestone, Ethan fears that he and Zeena will have that same fate. He fears that not only will he die with Zeena at his side, but also that he will stay in Starkfield forever.

## **Chapter 8**

Environment 11: As the realization that there is no way for him to run away west with Mattie at his side hits Ethan slowly, he feels utterly defeated and resigned to living in Starkfield as Zeena's husband. He feels like a prisoner, unable to escape the dreadful days of the long, bleak winters. Looking at the scenery around him from his window, Ethan futilely remembers that he was supposed to take Mattie sledding that very night.

Environment 12: On the day of Mattie's departure, Ethan's thoughts are focused on Mattie. Every thought of his day is connected to Mattie, especially the snow-covered landscape. The scenery surrounding him comes alive through Mattie's presence and memory. Inspired by how the landscape means so much to him and Mattie, Ethan makes up his mind to prevent Mattie from leaving Starkfield and from leaving him forever.

## **Chapter 9**

Environment 13: The countryside reminds Ethan and Mattie of the good times they shared on the land. The landscape has become their own private retreat. As they share fond, loving memories of the landscape, Ethan cannot imagine his life without Mattie. He cannot imagine what it would feel like not to have Mattie take wonder in the surroundings with him.



# Topic Tracking: Love

## Chapter 1

Love 1: Mattie is the only person with whom Ethan can share his love of nature. She takes as much pleasure in the sight of the landscape as he does. To Ethan, Mattie understands and comprehends his appreciation of nature and she shares many similar interests. He starts to believe that because of their many shared interests, his feelings for her may be reciprocated.

Love 2: Ethan tries to make up for Mattie's inefficient manner in managing household chores by doing some of her work at night, so that Zeena does not catch him helping Mattie out. By helping Mattie, Ethan's actions protect Mattie from Zeena's scolding. He does not want to give Zeena a reason for throwing her out because of inefficiency.

## Chapter 2

Love 3: Ethan wishes that he could express to Mattie exactly how much he cares for her and loves her, but he does not know how. All the years spent in quiet solitude and loneliness have made him a taciturn, reserved man. His relationship with Zeena has made him even more lonely than before; their marriage is not loving and tender at all. Ethan feels a passion for Mattie that he has never felt before.

## Chapter 4

Love 4: Without Zeena present, Ethan feels that life on the farm is actually very lively and blissful. Living under Zeena's cold and reserved control has made both Ethan and Mattie mindful of their actions and words; now that they are free from Zeena, they are able to enjoy each other's company freely and openly. Ethan feels especially happy; it is the first night that he and Mattie have ever been alone since she came to live with them on the farm.

## Chapter 5

Love 5: When Ethan and Mattie sit by the fire, they are positioned in the exact way that Ethan has dreamed of for so long: the two of them, sitting by the fire, in their cozy little house. Ethan has never felt such happiness and passion. They are genuinely enjoying each other's company and they engage in a friendly, easy conversation - one not riddled with accusation and complaint, like conversations with his wife.

Love 6: Fueled by their intimate conversation, Ethan is overcome with a desire to touch and kiss Mattie. Slowly kissing the sewing material that she had been working on all night, Ethan feels as if the sewing material is indeed an extension of Mattie herself. Ethan and Mattie's peaceful dream world is shattered when reality suddenly sinks in. Zeena will be returning home the next day. Their dreamlike world comes to an end when Ethan realizes that he has not even touched Mattie's hand, much less kissed her.



## **Chapter 6**

Love 7: Ethan envisions the night he spent with Mattie alone as part of the future, part of his destiny: he believes that he does have a chance of being in a relationship with Mattie. That night proved that he and Mattie do care for one another, and that they will find a way to be with each other despite Zeena's interference.

## **Chapter 7**

Love 8: Zeena's decision to throw Mattie out of their home enrages Ethan. He cannot believe that this cruel, bitter, heartless woman would actually have the audacity to take away from him the one person for whom he cares, the one person Zeena knows that he cares for more than anybody else. Ethan feels as if Mattie is slipping away from his grasp and that he cannot do anything to help her or to save her.

## **Chapter 8**

Love 9: Ethan schemes to run away with Mattie, rather than have Zeena throw Mattie out. Knowing that he cannot live without Mattie in his life, he believes that running away is the ideal solution. He remembers that another married couple had divorced, and the man ran away with the woman he truly loved, and his wife made a bundle of money from the farm she had sold. Running away with Mattie would be a dream come true for Ethan; he would be with her forever.

Love 10: On the morning of Mattie's departure, Ethan looks at the surrounding landscape and immediately connects the nature scenes with Mattie. Everywhere he looks, he sees a fond memory of the two of them. Unlike Zeena, who treats Mattie coldly, Ethan asks her if she needs any help with her things. Ethan is willing to do whatever Mattie needs until she leaves Starkfield.

Love 11: Ethan cannot help but think endlessly about Mattie when he looks at the landscape surrounding him. He loves her too much to let her go, and he decides that he must do everything in his power to prevent Mattie from leaving Starkfield - and out of his life. He knows that he could not bear to watch Mattie get on the train leaving town forever.

## **Chapter 9**

Love 12: At the sledding hill, Ethan and Mattie share a deep kiss; they realize that they cannot be separated. The separation would be too painful for either of them to bear; they must be together. Their love is powerful enough to make them consider dying for each other.

# Introduction

Having recently moved to Starkfield, Massachusetts, The narrator recounts the story of Ethan Frome, the hunched, frail man whose facial expression is unforgettable. The narrator recognizes "something bleak and unapproachable" in his face. Introduction, pg. 3 - 4 Harmon Gow, a townsman, informs the narrator that Ethan has looked that way since the "smash-up" almost twenty-four years ago. The narrator notices Ethan often in the post-office, as he collects his mail and pharmacy packages for Mrs. Zenobia (Zeena) Frome. He also notices that the townspeople all respect Ethan's reserve and solitude. When the narrator questions how Ethan got that way, Harmon answers that Ethan has been in Starkfield too long - he had to stay and care for his parents and then his wife, because there had not been anybody else. As Harmon says, "it's always Ethan done the caring." Introduction, pg. 7. The narrator begins to realize the significance of Harmon's words, "Guess he's been in Starkfield too many winters" Introduction, pg. 7, as he discovers the harshness and the loneliness of the winter.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 1

Topic Tracking: Environment 1

The narrator has been staying with the Hales, Mr. Ned Hale and his wife, Mrs. Ruth Varnum Hale, who tells the narrator that she has known the Fromes and that they were all friends. However, the narrator senses that something about the Fromes troubles her. Harmon Gow tells the narrator that Mrs. Ned Hale had been the first person to see them smashed-up. The narrator gets his chance to meet Ethan Frome when his daily driver to the train station, Denis Eady, is unable to drive him. Harmon suggests that the narrator ask Ethan to drive him for work, as the Fromes could use the extra money. Harmon tells him that Ethan has had troubles in his family for a long time - sickness, death, and poverty.

Ethan drives the narrator to and from the train station every day, although Ethan hardly talks to him. To the narrator, Ethan "seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe, with all that was warm and sentient in him fast bound below the surface...[living] in a depth of moral isolation too remote for casual access" Introduction, pg. 14 - 15. The narrator agrees with what Harmon had remarked to him earlier: Ethan has been in Starkfield too long.

Topic Tracking: Environment 2

The narrator attempts many times to warm up to Ethan, but never truly succeeds. When the narrator sees that Ethan has found his science book, Ethan surprises him by saying that the book included things he had not known. Ethan confuses the narrator even more when he shortly replies that he used to enjoy reading about science.

One especially snowy day, Ethan is driving the narrator from the station when the winds and the snow cause them to turn back - Ethan invites the narrator to stay at his home. The landscape of the Frome farm, and the farmhouse itself, is a bleak, cold sight to the

narrator. The narrator detects the sad, wistful tone in Ethan's words as he describes how much bigger and friendlier the house had been when his father was alive. To the narrator, the "diminished dwelling [is] the image of his own shrunken body." Introduction, pg. 21. As the narrator enters the Frome house, he hears a woman's voice moaning. That night, the narrator envisions the story of Ethan Frome.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 2

Topic Tracking : Environment 3

# Chapter 1

One winter night, young Ethan Frome is walking to the town church, where dances are held in the basement, to bring his wife's cousin, Mattie Silver, home. The stillness of the winter night reminds him of his engineering and physics courses, which he had been studying for about four years before his father's death had put an end to his studies. In the crowd of people dancing, Ethan looks for a red scarf - the red scarf Mattie always wears.

Topic Tracking: Colors 1

A jealous Ethan watches Denis Eady dancing with Mattie and notices her excitement. Every Sunday night, he looks forward to walking Mattie home from the dances, and he hopes that Denis does not take Mattie home. He remembers the time (over a year ago) when his wife, Zeena, suggested that her cousin, Mattie Silver, come to Starkfield to help care for her. Ethan became fond of her good nature, her liveliness, and her deep passion for nature, which he shares. She is the only person with whom he can share the wonder of nature: the stars at night, the snow-covered land, the fields. Ethan begins to think that Mattie cares for him as much as he cares for her.

Topic Tracking: Environment 4

Topic Tracking: Love 1

Ethan's wife Zeena is not ignorant of Ethan's affection for Mattie, nor does she overlook the attention Mattie pays to her husband. Zeena thinks Mattie is a careless, inefficient girl with no domestic skills at all, but Ethan privately believes that if Mattie does marry the man she loves, she will become a good housewife. Zeena is an ailing, "sickly" woman, whom, even at Ethan's admittance, needs a stronger girl to do the Fromes' housework. Ethan tries to compensate for Mattie's forgetful, absentminded manner by doing some of Mattie's chores himself, and one night Zeena catches him.

Topic Tracking: Love 2

Zeena informs Ethan that they should be prepared to hire a new girl if Mattie should leave to marry Denis Eady. Ethan disregards Zeena's words but when Zeena makes a stinging remark about how he must shave every morning, he knows that she understands Ethan and Mattie's affections for each other. Zeena knows he only started shaving regularly when Mattie came to Starkfield.

## Chapter 2

Denis Eady asks Mattie if he can take her home. An eavesdropping Ethan is scared, then happy again as Mattie refuses Denis's offer. He rushes to catch up with Mattie, and they head home. They pass the field with the big hill and the elm tree, where the local people sled, and Ethan promises to take her sledding one day.

Topic Tracking: Environment 5

Mattie's constant extremes in moods affect Ethan so much that he has to assure himself that she does care for him. He wishes that he could tell her how he feels, how he ardently longs for her affection; he wishes that he could be as free and open with his feelings as Mattie is with hers. An angry Mattie asks Ethan if he wants her to leave.

Topic Tracking: Love 3

As they continue walking in silence, the passing countryside is as somber and bleak as their conversation. Ethan asks her if she wants to leave, to which Mattie replies, "Where'd I go, if I did?" Chapter 2, pg. 49. Ethan, joyous from Mattie's response, feels warm and secure about his future. They pass the Frome graveyard on their way to the house. Ethan usually believes that the spirits of the graveyard seem to call out to him, "We never got away - how should you?" Chapter 2, pg. 50. With Mattie by his side, the sight of the gravestones comforts him. Ethan envisions that he and Mattie will lie there together in death.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 3

Topic Tracking: Environment 6

When they reach home, they find that Zeena has not left the key out for them as she always does. While they try to figure out a way to get inside the house, Zeena opens the door and startles them. Mattie, her lips, cheeks, and scarf a matching red, enters the house, in sharp contrast to the cold and sullen Zeena.

Topic Tracking: Colors 2

The sight of Zeena shakes Ethan out of his warm and secure reverie. His bleak and lonely vision of the future and his unavoidable mortality return.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 4

## Chapter 3

The next morning, Ethan recalls Zeena's coldness and the warmth of Mattie's touch the previous night. He regrets not kissing her the night before. He can still recall the day he first met her, when she had come to Starkfield, how she had been such a "colourless slip of a thing." Chapter 3, pg. 57.

Topic Tracking: Colors 3

Despite her frail body, Ethan noticed how Mattie had not complained at all during that first cold, harsh winter. He had felt sorry for the girl. Her father had been ostracized by the rest of the family for marrying a woman not from their area; his death left her practically penniless. When Zeena needed someone to help care for her, the family decided that Mattie would be the one to help her.

When Zeena suddenly decides to leave town to see a new doctor, Ethan realizes that she will not be back home until tomorrow night. All he can think about is how this will be the first time he and Mattie will be all alone. When he looks at Zeena, he notices that she looks unusually pale, haggard, and stoic, with her brown traveling dress adding a degree of coldness to her.

Topic Tracking: Colors 4

Ethan makes an excuse of collecting cash for their lumber to avoid taking Zeena to the train station. Zeena gives Mattie a bottle to use for making pickles.



## Chapter 4

With Zeena away, the farm becomes a warm and happy place. Ethan imagines their night alone will feel like time spent as a happily married couple. This image of life gives him such pleasure that he actually feels cheerful when returning home from the village.

Topic Tracking: Love 4

Ethan had always been quiet when he was growing up; after his father's death, his feelings of solitude and loneliness had gradually deepened. His mother became ill after his father died, and soon refused to talk; she wanted to listen to the sounds of the dead Fromes in the graveyard. Ethan became so lonely in the farmhouse that he welcomed the help of his cousin, Zenobia Pierce, to care for his mother. His father's death and his mother's illness had brought unwelcome sadness and incomprehensible isolation to Ethan, and Zeena's presence gave him happiness and security once again.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 5

Topic Tracking: Environment 7

Not only did Ethan admire Zeena's efficiency in caring for his mother, she restored his sense of duty; he felt he owed her so much for all that she had done for him. Ethan feared that had it not been for Zeena, he might have shut the rest of the world out completely, as his mother had done. After his mother died, Ethan dreaded being alone again on the farm, so he asked Zeena to marry him. They both wanted to leave Starkfield for larger towns where Ethan could learn more about engineering, but they could not sell the farm and the mill as quickly as they hoped.

Topic Tracking: Environment 8

Ethan could not find purchasers for the farm, and he began to realize the impossibility of moving; Zeena became ill within a year after they married. Ethan's fear of loneliness resurfaced as Zeena, now sickly, would hardly talk, like his mother. She would rarely speak to him, either because the hard farm life had taken its toll on her, or because "Ethan never listened." Chapter 4, pg. 72.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 6

Topic Tracking: Environment 9

Zeena's silence troubled him then as it does now; he knows that her silence makes her thoughts, suspicions, and feelings impossible to know. Zeena's silence only assures Ethan that she suspects his feelings for Mattie. He regrets telling Zeena that he is going to collect cash for lumber when he knows full well that he will not receive the money. He also knows that Zeena will see through his excuse. Ethan decides to ask Andrew Hale for an advance in the money. He feels ashamed to ask Andrew for the money; after Ethan's father died, it took him a while before the farm could make a profit. Ethan did



not want anyone in Starkfield to think that he was poor and destitute again. Hale refuses to give Ethan the money, as Ethan had expected.

On Ethan's way home, he passes the graveyard and looks at one stone, which bears the name of another Frome relative whose name is also Ethan. The dead Ethan had been married for fifty years, a fate which Ethan fears that he will have with Zeena.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 7

Topic Tracking: Environment 10

When Mattie opens the door for him, Ethan is struck by her appearance. Mattie holds a lamp that brings out the color of her skin and features, and wears a crimson ribbon that suddenly transforms her into a beautiful and vibrant woman. Ethan believes that she looks "taller, fuller, more womanly in shape and motion." Chapter 4, pg. 82.

Topic Tracking: Colors 5

Mattie has prepared a warm supper for the two of them, but Zeena's image are deep in their thoughts. The cat, Puss, accidentally knocks over Zeena's red pickle-dish, which throws Mattie into great despair.

Topic Tracking: Colors 6

She tells him that Zeena would be so angry to learn that her dish broke, for she had kept it safe on the top shelf and required her permission to use it. Ethan thinks of gluing the pieces back together. He tells an anguished Mattie that the dish will be fine.

## Chapter 5

When Ethan and Mattie finish their supper, they sit by the fire in a way that he has dreamed of so often.

Topic Tracking: Love 5

They talk to each other with ease until Ethan brings up the topic of marriage. He mentions that he had seen Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum kissing; this makes Mattie blush.

Topic Tracking: Colors 7

Ethan implores Mattie not to think about Zeena's dislike of her, and Mattie blushes again. Mattie draws herself away from Ethan a little, and Ethan notices her distance.

Topic Tracking: Colors 8

The thought of Zeena disturbs her as much as it does him. The severity of the situation - that Zeena will be returning home - hits Ethan and Mattie, who suddenly realize that they have only a few moments of solitude left. Ethan kisses the sewing material that Mattie had been working on, but then realizes that he had not even touched her hand.

Topic Tracking: Love 6

## Chapter 6

After their night together, Ethan feels unusually happy and blissful. He thinks that their night together is an indication of what their future is going to be.

Topic Tracking: Love 7

He plans to buy glue after work, and fix the dish before Zeena returns. Unfortunately, an injury to his horse and bad weather delay his return. When he finally reaches home with the glue, Mattie tells him that Zeena has already returned with Jotham Powell, the Fromes' hired hand. Mattie is worried Zeena will find out about the broken pickle-dish, but Ethan assures her that he can mend the dish that night. Ethan instinctively knows something is not right with Zeena when Jotham Powell refuses to eat with them.

## Chapter 7

Mattie sets the table for supper, but Zeena does not come downstairs. Ethan goes to see his wife, who informs him that she is having "complications." People in town believe that, if one had "complications," one was sure to die from them; Ethan is no exception. He thinks of the impact of Zeena's illness on his and Mattie's potential relationship, but his compassionate, sensitive nature softens his frustration with Zeena. Ethan is sympathetic to Zeena's needs, until Zeena tells him that her doctor, Dr. Buck has recommended to get a new hired girl, and that her aunt has found her a new one already. It is clear to Ethan that Zeena seeks revenge on him and Mattie. Having a new hired girl would inflate the cost of running the farm and send a clear message to Mattie that she is no longer welcome. He lashes out at Zeena angrily. An equally angry Zeena retorts that she her sickness is a result of nursing his mother before she died. Ethan becomes enraged, but manages to keep his temper in check by being practical. He tells her that he doesn't have the money to hire an extra girl, and is forced to admit that he lied: he didn't receive money from selling the lumber. When Ethan learns of Zeena's intention to throw Mattie out, he becomes even more enraged. Zeena's responds to Ethan's protests, "She's a pauper that's hung onto us all after her father'd done his best to ruin us. I've kept her here a whole year: it's somebody else's turn now." Chapter 7, pg. 115. To Ethan's horror, Zeena pointedly remarks that she knows that he and Mattie love each other. When he hears Zeena's words, he feels powerless and under her control.

For the first time in his life he sees her differently. He sees her as:

*"no longer the listless creature who had lived at his side in a state of sullen self-absorption, but a mysterious alien presence, an evil energy secreted from the long years of silent brooding...All the long misery of his baffled past, of his youth of failure, hardship and vain effort, rose up in his soul in bitterness and seemed to take shape before him in the woman who at every turn had barred his way. She had taken everything else from him; and now she meant to take the one thing that made up for all the others."* Chapter 7, pg. 117- 118.

When Ethan tells Mattie that Zeena wants her to leave, he dreams of her drowning and him dying to be near her, feeling her next to him.

Topic Tracking: Love 8

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 8

Zeena discovers the broken pickle-dish. Ethan, defiant, lies to Zeena insisting that the cat broke the dish, but Mattie admits that she was the one who brought the dish out. Zeena, enraged, lashes out at Mattie just as violently as she had with Ethan earlier.



## Chapter 8

Ethan retreats to his little study, the room his mother had given him when he had returned to the farm after his father's last illness. He had gone to the room to sit quietly by himself when his father and mother were ill; now that there was no available source of heat in the winter for the study, he rarely went there. Ethan feels conflicted by the confused emotions swirling in his head:

*"He was too young, too strong, too full of the sap of living, to submit so easily to the destruction of his hopes. Must he wear out all his years at the side of a bitter querulous woman?"* Chapter 8, pg. 130-1.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 9

Ethan recalls man and his wife who divorced: the man ran out west with the woman he loved and with whom he had a child, and his wife sold their farm and used the profit to start and run her own restaurant. For a fleeting moment, he dreams of doing the same: running away with Mattie and leaving Zeena alone with the farm.

Topic Tracking: Love 9

He starts a letter to Zeena, explaining that he has done all that he could for her, but stops. He forgets to destroy the letter. Ethan realizes that if he leaves the farm and the mill for Zeena to sell, he would have nothing for himself. Zeena would probably not receive much for the farm and mill anyway. Ethan finds a recent newspaper, and looks up a list of prices for going west; they are much too high for him to afford. He feels defeated, and knows there is no way out. He has become a "prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished." Chapter 8, pg. 134. Looking at the landscape from the window, he instinctively connects the scene with Mattie and remembers how he was supposed to take her sledding today.

Topic Tracking: Environment 11

The next morning, Mattie visits him in his study; Ethan is surprised to see her not looking her usual self. Mattie looks pale and sad, her red scarf not even brightening up her image. Both are concerned about each other's well being and welfare.

Topic Tracking: Colors 9

Topic Tracking: Love 10

Mattie's immediate departure makes Ethan feel helpless and powerless. Again, when he leaves the house for work, he cannot help but feel Mattie's presence in the surrounding landscape. Whatever he sees is connected with Mattie, and he makes up his mind to try to stop Mattie from leaving.

Topic Tracking: Environment 12

Topic Tracking: Love 11

He decides to ask Andrew Hale for the money again. When he goes to the Hales', he encounters Mrs. Andrew Hale, who is incredibly sympathetic to Ethan's fate.

*"I always tell Mr. Hale I don't know what [Zeena'd] 'a' done if she hadn't 'a' had you to look after her; and I used to say the same thing 'bout your mother. You've had an awful mean time, Ethan Frome"* Chapter 8, pg. 142, Mrs. Hale tells him.

Ethan feels ashamed of himself for having planned to take advantage of the Hales' compassion and kindness. As he walks back home, he reflects on the horror of his fate as a poor man who would actually be as low as to consider taking advantage of a couple's kindness and pity.

## Chapter 9

Zeena makes Mattie carry her large trunk downstairs by herself, until Ethan steps in and carries it for her. While Mattie is upset at leaving, Ethan is angered at Zeena for putting Mattie in this position. Zeena does not care at all for Mattie's welfare and safety. He informs Zeena that he will take Mattie to the station, not their hired hand. Before they leave, he later finds Mattie in his study, looking around. As they drive pass the familiar countryside, they decide to stop at a clearing. They recall their memories of the church picnic, where they had talked by themselves for the first time. Ethan recalls how pretty Mattie had looked in her pink hat.

Topic Tracking: Colors 10

To Ethan, every place in the country has a special significance. Maybe it was a spot where they had once talked or laughed - every part of the landscape represents his connection to Mattie.

Topic Tracking: Environment 13

After Mattie confesses that she found Ethan's unfinished letter to Zeena, she rips it up into shreds, exclaiming that it would have been no use. An equally miserable Ethan tells her, "I want to put my hand out and touch you. I want to do for you and care for you. I want to be there when you're sick and when you're lonesome" Chapter 9, pg. 158 - 159 and wishes that he would rather have her die than marry another. Mattie admits that she has wished the same thing as well. In an act of rebellion, they decide to take a ride on a sled. Their ride brings them inexpressible glee and joy. They both feel too carefree and happy to worry about crashing into the big elm tree. The two of them share a deep kiss in the very spot Ethan spotted Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum kissing, and they break apart, crying that they cannot be separated from one another.

Topic Tracking: Love 12

Mattie asks Ethan to take them down again for another ride - only this time right into the big elm tree. Ethan thinks about how intolerable life on the farm would be without Mattie. Hiding in the shade of the spruces, Ethan imagines that death would feel like that, as he thinks, "[We've] might have been in [our] coffins underground." Chapter 9, pg. 167.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 10

Ethan suddenly decides to steer from the front, not the back. As they make their way down the hill toward the tree, at the last possible moment, Ethan has a vision of monstrous-looking Zeena blocking him from the tree. The next thing Ethan knows, he is lying on the ground, his body aching painfully. He hears an animal moaning pitifully in pain, until he realizes that the moaning sound does not come from an animal - it is coming from Mattie.



## Perilogue

The narrator sees two women sitting in the kitchen, one preparing the meal, the second sitting immobile in the chair. The narrator realizes that the droning, moaning sound comes from the second woman sitting in the chair. Ethan introduces the women to the narrator - the tall woman is his wife, Miss Frome, and the other, Miss Mattie Silver.

When the narrator returns to the Hales', Mrs. Hale is surprised to learn that he had spent the night at the Frome farm. She surmises that the narrator must have been the first stranger to stay in the Frome house for over twenty years, but confesses that it is always Ethan's face that gets to her the most, not the sight of the women. Recalling when she saw the injured Mattie and Ethan right after their sled ride, she breaks down into tears for poor Mattie and Ethan. Zeena had both sent to the house so that she could care for them.

"There was nowhere else for [Mattie] to go," Mrs. Hale says of Mattie, "and then Ethan's face'd break your heart...When I see that, I think it's *him* that suffers most." Perilogue, pg. 179 - 180. Mrs. Hale speaks sadly that it might have been better if Mattie had died, for:

*"if she'd ha' died, Ethan might ha' lived; and the way they are now, I don't see's there's much difference between the Fromes up at the farm and the Fromes down in the graveyard' 'cept that down there they're all quiet, and the women have got to hold their tongues."* Perilogue, pg. 181.

Topic Tracking: Death and Isolation 11