

## **Prologue**

1. How is this story told?

Where did it take place?

2. What are 4 words or phrases used to describe Ethan Frome?

3. How old is Ethan?

Why did this surprise the narrator?

4. When was the “smash-up”?

What were the obvious physical results of Ethan’s “smash-up”?

5. How did people treat Ethan?

6. What one sentence expresses the narrator’s surprised reaction to Harmon Gow’s comment about Ethan’s toughness and life expectancy?

What did Gow reply?

7. Why did Ethan remain in Starkfield?

8. What one sentence served to foreshadow the narrator’s experience in Starkfield?

9. What does when winter “shut down on Starkfield” imply?

10. By what other phrase did the narrator describe the March winds?

What literary device(s) is(are) being used?

11. To what did the narrator compare Starkfield?

What literary device(s) is(are) being used?

12. To what did the narrator compare Ethan's brown "seamed" (scarred) profile?

Briefly describe how Ethan behaved toward the narrator:

13. What was in contrast to Ethan's "outer situation"?

14. Provide an example of the imagery Wharton uses to describe the setting on page 22:

Provide an example of the imagery Wharton uses to describe the setting on pages 22-23:

15. What did the narrator find out that night?

## **Chapter I**

1. List 2 examples of imagery (and the page #) from any point in this chapter:

a.

b.

2. List 3 things the reader learns about Ethan:

a.

b.

c.

3. Based on this chapter, how can the reader characterize Ethan's behavior?

4. List 3 things the reader learns about Mattie Silver:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
5. Upon what does the relationship of Ethan and Mattie seem based?
6. What do you think is wrong with Zeena?
7. What does Ethan do to make up for Mattie's lack of domestic skills?
8. When Zeena says, "I guess you're always late, now you shave every morning," what does the reader realize about her?
9. Explain the meaning of the following quote (p. 36):

"All his life was lived in the sight and sound of Mattie Silver and he could no longer conceive of it being otherwise."

## **Chapter II**

1. Why does Ethan stay in the shadows when the people come out of the church?
2. What does "...though it seemed to him that his life hung on her next gesture" mean?
3. Why does Ethan's "...heart, which had swung out over a black void," tremble "back to safety" when Mattie doesn't get into the sleigh with Eady?
4. Why does Ethan have "the sense of having done something arch (playful) and ingenious (clever)"?

5. The narrator uses a simile to describe the icy slope. To what does he compare it?

6. Explain what Mattie is referring to when she says, “Wouldn’t it have been too awful?”

What literary device may this be an example of?

7. Why does Ethan “attach a fantastic importance to every change in her look and tone”?

8. Ethan finally gets up the nerve to ask the question that has caused him so much inner conflict. What does he want to know? (p. 43)

What is her reply?

9. Before this night, how had Ethan felt about the Frome gravestones?

What had Ethan regretfully thought would happen to him?

In what way has his feeling about the gravestone changed?

10. What does Ethan say to Mattie as they pass the graveyard?

What is he thinking?

11. A crape streamer is a black ribbon that was put on the front door of the house of someone who died. Who does Ethan fantasize the streamer is for?

12. What does Zeena mean when she says, “I just felt so mean I couldn’t sleep”?

13. What did Ethan not want Mattie to see?

Why?

14. Why did Ethan decide to go upstairs?

15. The narrator gives the reader a powerful image when he says, “and with lowered head he went up in his wife’s wake...” A wake is the track left on water’s surface by a ship. What image does Ethan have of his wife as a person?

### Chapter III

1. What do you think the following quote, found on page 52, means (focus on the last part):

“It was formed of Zeena’s obstinate silence, of Mattie’s sudden look of warning, of the memory of just such fleeting imperceptible signs as those which told him, on certain stainless mornings, that before night there would be rain.”

2. How old is Ethan?                      Zeena?

3. What do you think is meant by Ethan’s “... imprudence of letting Zeena think he was in funds on the eve of one of her therapeutic excursions”? (p. 55)

4. Zeena is characterized as cheap at the end of the chapter. What is the example that shows this?

### Chapter IV

1. Up to this point in the novel, when the house or the environment are described, it is in dark terms or in stark, cold terms. What are some of the things that we now see in the kitchen in Zeena’s absence?

2. What unusual things did Ethan do on his way through the fields that showed “a slumbering spark of sociability which the long Starkfield winters had not yet extinguished”? (p. 58)

3. What “increased the chill of his return to Starkfield”?

4. Why didn't Ethan have time to socialize in the village?
5. What did his mother almost stop doing after her "trouble"?
6. What do you find out about Zeena on page 59?
7. Why was Zeena so attractive to Ethan?  
  
What was she like then?  
  
Why did Ethan ask her to stay?
8. What did he think "would not have happened if his mother had died in spring instead of winter"?
9. What had Zeena shown Ethan that she had not expected when she married? (p. 60)
10. What does "She chose to look down on Starkfield, but she could not have lived in a place which looked down on her" mean about Zeena?
11. What would she have suffered in a city?  
  
What did she develop?  
  
Why was she such a skilled nurse?
12. Why didn't Ethan speak much to her?
13. Why had her silence suddenly begun to trouble him?
14. What does Ethan ask Hale for? Why?
15. Why does he have trouble asking for it?
16. Why does Ethan feel "a thrilling sense of mastery" at the close of the chapter?

## Chapter V

1. What are 2 words or phrases the narrator uses to describe the scene in the kitchen?  
(1)  
(2)

2. Where did Mattie sit so Ethan could see her?

Why did it give him “a momentary shock”?

3. What did Ethan remind Mattie they were supposed to do that night?

4. Why didn't they go coasting?

When do they plan to?

5. Ethan says he'd be scared of something. What?

Why?

6. What literary element might be in use here?

7. How does Mattie react when Ethan told her about seeing a friend of hers being kissed?

8. What quote illustrates what Ethan imagines might happen as a result of their conversation about a young couple kissing in the shadows?

9. How did Mattie react the night before, when Ethan put his arm around her?

10. What does Ethan comment about her future?

11. In what way did it seem that Zeena was present even though she was away?

12. What does Ethan do that may be surprising?

## Chapter VI

1. Briefly describe what Ethan's goal for the day is, how he works, what goes wrong, and why he goes through so much trouble:

2. Now that Zeena is back home, how does the kitchen look?

3. Why does Ethan want Jotham to stay for supper?

Why does Jotham NOT want to stay for supper?

## Chapter VII

1. What does Zeena say to explain the condition of her health?

2. What is the difference between her "troubles" and her "complications"?

3. About what do Ethan and Zeena argue?

Upon what does she blame her health?

What is surprising about their "scene of open anger"?

4. What is Zeena's excuse for getting rid of Mattie?

5. What does Ethan say in order to shame her into keeping Mattie on?

6. To whom do the following terms apply?

- "...a mysterious alien presence" \_\_\_\_\_

- "...a youth of failure, hardship, and vain effort" \_\_\_\_\_

- "...the one thing that made up for all the others" \_\_\_\_\_

7. What does Ethan finally say that signals he has reached a desperate point? (p. 96)



8. Why is he overcome with shame? (p. 96)
9. What do both Mattie and Ethan know is true about Zeena?
10. What comes distinctly for the first time for Mattie? (p. 97)
11. Briefly explain how Zeena finds the broken dish:
12. What does Zeena cruelly say about Mattie's character?
13. Discuss the simile in the last paragraph on page 101:

### **Chapter VIII**

1. How was Zeena described in the fourth paragraph?
2. a. What did Ethan remember another man doing to escape "a life of misery"?  
  
b. How did he and the girl do after that?  
  
c. How did the wife do?
3. What was he going to tell Zeena in the note? Explain briefly:

4. There are many reasons why he realizes his plan won't work. What are they?
5. Once Ethan realizes there "was no way out – none" he describes himself as:
6. a. What was Ethan supposed to have done that night?  
b. What makes it ironic on a night like this?
7. How did Mattie know where Ethan was?
8. Of what did Zeena accuse Mattie?
9. Why was Ethan not going to be at dinner?
10. Who was in Hale's sleigh?
11. What did Mrs. Hale say that made Ethan feel "less alone with his misery"?
12. Why couldn't Ethan ask Andrew for money after all?

## **Chapter IX**

1. What two words describe how Mattie's room looks?
2. How does Zeena react to Ethan stating he would take Mattie to the train?
3. Do you think the furnace really needs fixing? Why or why not?
4. Where did Ethan head instead of Starkfield?

5. To what did the term “shy secret spot” refer?
6. Explain the significance of the spot:
7. What season was this memory? Why is that significant?
8. What brief illusion did Ethan have?
9. Why can’t he tell Mattie what he was thinking?
10. a. What did Mattie show Ethan?  
b. What did Mattie now know that she had not realized back at the farm?
11. How long has Mattie thought romantically of Ethan?
12. a. Look at the conversation they have on page 125. What does it tell you about their ability to accept reality?  
b. Does this make it easier or harder for them to accept the fact that they can’t be together?
13. What two lines indicate to what Ethan and Mattie may resort if they cannot figure out a way to live together? (One is spoken by Ethan, one by Mattie.)
  - a.
  - b.
14. What do they decide to do before going to the station?
15. What did Ethan say about his ability to navigate the hill in the dark?
16. Despite their momentary happiness, what did Ethan say to himself with every step of their climb?

17. What is the significance of the church clock striking 5:00?

18. What does Mattie suggest as a solution to their problem?

19. When Mattie asked Ethan where she would go if she left him, what three things did she think of that were like “fragments torn from his heart”? (p. 130)

a.

b.

c.

20. What made Ethan’s vision of the house he was going back to “more intolerable to return to...”?

21. Of what did the blackness and silence remind Ethan?

22. As Mattie tugged at Ethan’s hand, she seems to be “the embodied instrument of fate” (p. 131). What does this mean?

23. a. Why does Ethan first tell Mattie he wants to sit in the front?

b. What did Ethan say was the real reason he wanted to sit in front?

24. Can you speculate another reason why he wanted to sit in front?

25. What caused the sled to swerve?

26. After they hit the elm, what did Ethan think he heard?

27. What was the “monstrous load” lying on him?

28. Characterize Ethan. Why would he think, after such a dramatic and horrible event, about feeding his horse?

## Epilogue

Go back to page 26. Read it again ... then continue on by reading after the page break on page 134 as if it were a continuation of page 26.

1. At what point in time is the story now taking place?

2. What kind of narration is now being used?

What kind was being used from pages 27-134?

3. Who is the woman with a “tall bony figure,” “thin grey hair,” and “pale opaque eyes which revealed nothing and reflected nothing”?

4. a. How was Mattie like Zeena?

b. What literary element is in play here?

5. What made Ruth feel bad when she visited the Frome farm?

6. What did the townspeople never know about the night of the accident?

7. In what way had Zeena changed since the accident?

8. Why were winters still hard at the Frome farm?

9. What did Ruth say that had shocked the minister?

10. What did Ruth speculate might have happened if Mattie had died?

11. What were the differences between the Fromes buried in the graveyard and the Fromes up at the farm?