

Literary ideas



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Literary Ideas Elements of Native American literature: " World on Turtle's Back, " " Song of the Sky Loom, " " Hunting Song, " and " The Man to Send Rain Clouds" * Native American Traditions * Harmony with nature -Kinship with animals, plants, land, heavenly bodies; all elements seen as live and aware * Story Telling and Performances -Song, dance, and chants * Complex Religious Beliefs -Rituals, Ceremonies * Oral Literature * Myth A Myth is a legendary or traditional story, usually concerning a superhuman being and dealing with events that have no natural explanation. A myth may also be an unproved belief that is accepted uncritically or an invented idea or story. It usually attempts to explain a phenomenon or strange occurrence without regard to fact of common sense and appeals to the emotions rather than reason. A myth is less historical than a legend and usually persists through oral transmission, as do legends and fables. * Creation Myth Elements of Trickster Tales in " Coyote and the Buffalo, " " Fox and Coyote and Whale" * Folk Tales * stories handed down, usually by word-of-mouth, from generation to generation. * Trickster Tales * Folk Tales that feature animal or human character who engages in deceit, violence, and magic * Character often has contradictory qualities; moral yet immoral, foolish yet clever, greedy and helpful * Mythic- explaining features of the world Elements of Historical Narratives: " La Relacion, " " Of Plymouth Plantation, " " Olaudah Equiano" * Plymouth Plantations * Primary Sources * Secondary Sources * Audience Elements of a Narrative: * Plot A plot is a plan or scheme to accomplish a purpose. In literature, this is the arrangement of events to achieve an intended effect consisting of a series of carefully devised and interrelated actions that progress through a struggle of opposing forces, called conflict, to a climax and a denouement. * Character A character is an aggregate of

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traits and features that form the nature of some person or animal. It also refers to moral qualities and ethical standards and principles. In literature, character refers to a person represented in a story, novel, play, etc. * Setting

* Conflict * Resolution * Symbol * Frame in Ethan Frome Elements of

Persuasion: “ Declaration of Independence, ” Patrick Henry’s Speech, “

Lecture to a Missionary, ” “ Stride Toward Freedom, ” and Interview with

Malcom X * Rhetoric The art of communicating ideas * Persuasive Rhetoric

Reasoned arguments in favor or against particular beliefs or courses of

action * Logical Appeals Provide rational arguments to support writer’s

claims * Deductively * To deduce something, to think of an idea *

Premise/generalization * Analysis to support examples. * Inductively * The

generalization after deduction * Synthesis * Emotional Appeals * Appeals to

emotion * Based on specific examples: suffering/potential death * Rich in

connotations and vivid images * Ethical Appeals * Based on shared moral

values * Calls forth Audience’s sense of right, justice, and virtue * Elevated

Language * Rhetorical Questions * Questions that do not require answers *

Show their arguments to make answers seem obvious * Repetition *

Repeating a point to tell the audience the topic is especially important *

Parallelism: a form of repetition Various Literary Terms/Vocabulary Archetype

The original model or pattern from which copies are made of from which

something develops. It is also a symbol, theme, setting, or character that is

thought to have some universal meaning and recurs in different times and

places in myth, literature, folklore, dreams, and rituals. Parallelism

Parallelisms are an arrangement of the parts of a composition so that

elements of equal importance are balanced in similar constructions. This

arrangement may be applied to words, phrases, clauses, sentences,

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paragraphs, or complete units of compositions. It is a rhetorical device.

Allusion An allusion is a reference, usually brief, often casual, occasionally indirect, to a person, event, or condition thought to be familiar to the reader.

The purpose of allusion is to bring a world of experience outside the

limitation of a statement to the reader. **Paraphrase** Paraphrasing is the

restatement of a passage giving the meaning in another form. This usually

involves expanding the original text so as to make it clear. **Repetition** **Tone**

Historical Context **Epic** Sometimes called a heroic poem, and epic is a

lengthy narrative poem in which the action, characters, and language are on

a heroic level and the style is exalted and even majestic. Early epics often

stemmed from oral traditions. Major characteristics of epics are: 1. A setting

remote in time and place 2. An objective, lofty, dignified style 3. A central

incident or series of incidents dealing with legendary or traditional material

4. A theme involving universal human problems 5. A towering hero of great

stature 6. A superhuman strength of body, character, or mind 7.

Superhuman forces entering the action **Diction** Diction, choice of words,

especially with regard to correctness, clearness, or effectiveness generally

have accepted levels of diction—formal, informal, colloquial, or slang—may be

correct in a particular context but incorrect in another or when mixed

unintentionally. **Sensory Details** **Flashback** An interjection of chronological

sequence by interjection of events of the past used to explain what

happened previously. The “inner story” is told in flashbacks. Other

Vocabulary **Criterion** A standard of judgment or criticism; a rule or principle

for evaluating or testing something **Posit** To lay down or assume as a fact or

principle; **postulate** **Acquiesce** To assent tacitly; submit or comply silently or

without protest; **agree**; **consent** **Placate** To appease or pacify, especially by

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concessions or conciliatory gestures Succumb To give way to superior force.

Contend To struggle with opposition; to strive in rivalry; compete; to strive in debate To assert or maintain earnestly Lament To feel or express sorrow or regret for Scoff To speak derisively; mock; jeer; deride Embody To give a concrete form to; express, personify, or exemplify in concrete form To collect into or include in a body; to embrace of comprise Feigned Pretended; sham; counterfeit; assumed; fictitious; disguised Aloof At a distance, especially in feeling or interest; reserved or reticent; indifferent; disinterested Stench An offensive smell or odor; stink; a foul quality Nominal Being such in name only; so called; putative; named as a mere matter of form, being trifling in comparison with the actual value; measured in amount rather than in real value. Avarice Insatiable greed for riches; inordinate; miserly desire to gain and hoard wealth Wretched Very unfortunate in condition or circumstances; miserable; pitiable Querulous Full of complaints; complaining Reticent Disposed to be silent or not to speak freely; reserved; reluctant or restrained Taciturn Inclined to silence; reserved in speech; reluctant to join in conversation; dour, stern, and silent in expression and manner Poignant Keenly distressing to the feelings; keen or strong in mental appeal; affecting or moving emotions; pungent to the smell Grammar Complex Sentences A complex sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinator (FANBOYS). Except for very short sentences, coordinators are always preceded by a comma. Compound Sentences A complex sentence has an independent clause joined by one or more dependent clauses. A complex sentence always has a subordinator (e. g. because, since, after, although, when). Ethan Frome ----- Chapter i Summary

At midnight, through an accumulated snowfall of some two feet, a young

Ethan Frome walks the quiet streets of Starkfield. Near the edge of the village, he stops in front of the community church, where a dance is being held. He makes his way around the church's perimeter and settles in front of a basement window, craning his neck to get a view of the festivities. The dance is concluding, and the assembled group is preparing to leave. But when the young, handsome, and energetic Denis Eady jumps back onto the dance floor and claps his hands, the musicians take up their instruments and the dance hall again fills with life. Ethan focuses his attention on Mattie Silver, a girl wearing a cherry-colored scarf and dancing with Eady. She is cousin to Ethan's wife, Zeena, and has been living with the Fromes as a housekeeper for over a year. Ethan, who has come to walk Mattie home from the dance, has become quite attached to her in the course of the year, finding a kinship with her in their mutual appreciation of nature. As he watches her whirling effortlessly among the pulsating crowd, he wonders why he had ever dreamed that the feelings of attraction might be mutual. It seems to him that her free and easy movement between partners indicates her indifference toward him. Ethan recalls a recent conversation with Zeena, in which she suggested that Mattie might marry Denis Eady and that they would need to hire a new girl to help—"the doctor don't want I should be left without anybody," she insists. This memory disquiets him, and as he waits for Mattie, he begins to brood.

Analysis Beginning with Chapter I, Wharton plunges the reader into the story with a jolt of energy that is quite different from the more conversational tone of the narrator's frame. The description of Starkfield at midnight, with the excited dancers whirling indoors while the world outside lies frozen, overflows with sensory details. Moreover, the warmth and richness of the scene inside the church creates a strong

impression of the young Ethan as a man set apart from society. Married prematurely to an ailing, unattractive wife, Ethan feels despair at his exclusion from the revelry. Yet, he also takes a certain pleasure in his position as an unnoticed voyeur. While the sensory richness of the first scene bursts suddenly into the mind of the reader, Wharton reveals factual information at a much more gradual pace. She tempers the scandal by composing it piecemeal, through a slow, subtle process of accumulated information, which keeps our minds open to the narrator's own descriptions and analysis. At the outset, the young Ethan's reason for gazing through the church window is unclear. We see that he is infatuated with a girl in a cherry-colored scarf, but his romantic interest only gains significance once Wharton discloses that Ethan is already a married man and that the object of his desire is his own wife's cousin, who lives under his own roof. In light of these details, Ethan's preoccupation with Mattie Silver takes on an illicit air. Wharton presents and describes Denis Eady and Mattie Silver before giving them names or dialogue of their own. This approach achieves a certain realism, as we must observe these characters and make inferences about them, just as we would with new acquaintances in real life. Mattie, in particular, becomes burned into the reader's consciousness through the focus of Ethan's own consciousness—her twisting, fluttering, cherry-colored scarf. Brightly colored and shining vividly amid the matte, wintry landscape, the scarf marks Mattie as a person worthy of notice (her last name—Silver—likewise suggests that she flashes like metal and is therefore highly visible). The scarf's redness, symbolizing devilishness or sin, suggests that Mattie may be a figure of wrongdoing or rebellion. As the plot unfolds, she does indeed come to embody transgression against social convention in the name

of individual passions, a notion that takes on thematic import in the novel as a whole. ----- Chapter ii Summary As the dance ends, Ethan first hears and then sees Mattie emerge, but he shrinks back in the shadows to avoid initiating contact. The crowd thins out rapidly, and Mattie is left wondering what has kept Ethan from coming to meet her. As Mattie stands alone, Eady approaches, offering to take her for a ride in his father's cutter (a light sleigh drawn by a horse). Ethan, still hanging back, observes Mattie seeming to waver, and wonders whether she will go with Eady or refuse his attentions. After unhitching the horse from its post and setting the cutter in motion, Eady confidently calls out to Mattie to hop in. She politely declines. When Eady attempts to pick her up by linking arms with her, she draws away gracefully. As Frome listens to the bells of the cutter fade away in the distance, he sees Mattie's shadow walking alone up the hill toward the silent snow bank. Ethan quickly closes in on Mattie, surprising her with his presence when he catches up to her amidst the Varnums' spruce trees. She is genuinely caught off guard by his trick and lets out a peal of laughter that thrills Ethan. They link arms together and look at the "coasting hill," where people go sledding. Ethan says they can sled there the following night if the moon is out. Mattie mentions that Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum, a young engaged couple, nearly collided with the big elm at the bottom of the hill when they were sledding. "We were all sure they were killed," she says with a shudder. Beginning the hike home, Ethan continues to wonder about Mattie's feelings toward Eady and decides to press the issue by needling Mattie about her behavior at the dance. But his roundabout fashion of pursuing the conversation only leads Mattie to believe that Ethan's wife, Zeena, is on the verge of dismissing her. Mattie wonders if

Ethan himself is similarly inclined, although dismissal of Mattie is the furthest thing from Ethan's mind. Left at an impasse, the couple drops the subject wordlessly, and Ethan and Mattie continue on their way. At the Frome gate, Ethan attempts to reassure Mattie, and the companions then draw together as they ascend the hill. Ethan, meditating on the prospect of being with Mattie always, puts his arm decidedly around her for the first time. At the back door of the dark house, Ethan searches for the key that Zeena usually leaves out for them, but he finds nothing. When Ethan kneels down for a more thorough search, he spies a faint ray of light behind the door. The door then opens to reveal Zeena, a sickly, complaining woman. Zeena explains that she was unable to sleep on account of her poor health, and she brings her lamp around to the stairs to light the way up. Ethan declares that he will be staying downstairs for a while, as he has some accounts to review. When Zeena dismisses the idea as a foolish one, he submissively follows her and Mattie upstairs, retiring into the bedroom with his wife.

Analysis In Mattie, Ethan finds a somewhat mystical kinship—the text compares Ethan's infatuation with his wife's cousin to the " shock of silent joy" that he feels when he contemplates the beauties of nature. Given his sensitivity to place, it is no surprise that Ethan feels especially energized during his nighttime walks home from town with Mattie. During these moments, Ethan feels most strongly the " sweetness" of the connection between them. Standing between Ethan and Mattie is the ailing Zeena, another character whom Wharton reveals only by hints and degrees. An early passage describes Zeena as having sharp and suspicious eyes, and although the conversation that Ethan remembers as he stands outside the church (summarized in the previous section) seems harmless, Zeena's words resonate with hidden

insight. For instance, when Zeena states to Ethan that the doctor thinks she shouldn't be left alone, it seems that she is arguing the necessity of a housekeeper, but underlying this remark is Zeena's sense that Ethan and Mattie could run off together. Just when we are sure that Zeena's sole concern is the possibility of Mattie leaving, she makes a caustic remark about the fact that since Mattie's arrival, Ethan has taken to shaving every day. This remark also seems to belie Zeena's well-founded suspicion of an intrigue between her husband and her cousin, as does her evening vigil. Wharton's caricature-like depiction of Zeena makes her seem like an old woman who possesses neither beauty nor kindness. Juxtaposed with Mattie, Zeena serves as a foil (a character whose attitudes or emotions contrast with and thereby accentuate those of another character), highlighting Mattie's vigor. Mattie seems to embody health, with her vibrant scarf and her last name, Silver, which suggests brightness. Zeena, on the other hand, speaks in a "flat whine," and when she appears at the doorway to greet Ethan, Wharton dwells on her "flat breast," "puckered throat," and the "hollows and prominences" of her face. The contest for Ethan's heart is no contest at all—Mattie seems to be Ethan's soul-mate, Zeena a nagging, hypochondriacal shrew. Because the reader already knows, by the time the narrator meets Ethan, that Ethan is disfigured, a mood of foreboding hangs over the story. The "throng of disregarded hints and menaces" that crowd Ethan's mind at the dance foreshadows the impending danger. The conversation about the sledding hill, with its mention of the potentially deadly elm, also constitutes a deliberate and obvious foreshadowing of later events.

----- Chapter iii Summary The morning after the dance, Ethan heads out early to the wood lot to attend to some hauling.

He and Zeena have not exchanged a single word since retiring the previous night, during which Ethan lay awake for many hours, preoccupied by his thoughts of Mattie. As he hauls the wood, Ethan regrets that he didn't kiss Mattie when they were alone together the night before. Ethan's mind then turns to the relationship between Mattie and Zeena, which has been chilly ever since Mattie came to live in Starkfield, after her father died. A sense of dread and foreboding fills Ethan, and he channels his fear by throwing himself into his work until midday. He considers driving his lumber load into the village at once, but then thinks better of it and returns to the house to check on the women. Coming in, he is surprised to see Zeena sitting at the table in her best dress, with a small piece of luggage at her side. She says that she cannot stand her recurring pains any longer and has resolved to set out for Bettsbridge on an overnight visit in order to see a new doctor. Ethan quickly agrees to Zeena's proposal that Jotham Powell, the hired man, drive her to the train station. He would drive her himself, he says, but he must collect a direct cash payment from Andrew Hale upon his delivery of a load of wood that afternoon. Ethan's excuse is a lie, since Hale is unlikely to pay up, but Ethan has no desire to go for a long ride with his wife. Analysis As Ethan toils at his farm work, his thoughts of Mattie stream into a series of worries that reveal his capacity as a " seer, " one who senses the subtle signs of looming tragedy. Ethan's thoughts also tell us about the nature of the tragic events to come, so that we too become seer[s] of a sort. Wharton associates Ethan's insights into the future with his ability to predict rain, despite appearances to the contrary on " stainless" mornings. We can perceive that this statement is a metaphor for the state of Ethan and Mattie's relationship: although Ethan's conduct with Mattie has hitherto

remained stainless, from our knowledge of his desire for her, we can predict the " storm" that they will soon experience. Ethan's reaction to his foresight is a passive denial. As he grows increasingly aware of an inevitable disaster surrounding his passion for Mattie, he throws himself into his logging with extra zeal, as though hard work will enable him to escape from what we already understand to be predestined. As Ethan muses on his present love for Mattie, the narrator muses on Ethan's loveless marriage, undertaken out of fear of misery rather than true devotion. The moment introduces one of the novel's themes: the conflict between warm inner desire and cold external realities. The theme receives emphasis when, in subsequent chapters, we learn of Ethan's dream to leave his farm and work in a town—perhaps even as an engineer—and see how circumstances conspire to thwart him. Again and again, Wharton links Starkfield's weather to the characters' emotional states to show that the external world takes precedence over the internal landscape of a character's being. No description in the novel is neutral. We learn that the bleakness of the New England winters contributed to the sense of loneliness and depression that pushed Ethan into Zeena's sickly arms: the marriage between Ethan and Zeena might not have happened if Ethan's mother " had died in spring instead of winter. " Every setting seems to restrict, inhibit, and debilitate, generating sickness and disability—another of the novel's themes. By this point in the novel, we have learned of Ethan's mother's illness, of Zeena's maladies, and of the disabilities that Ethan suffers by the end of the story's plot. Zeena's unexpected departure for Bettsbridge can be seen as evidence of either naïveté or mistrust. Certainly, departure is the last move that one would expect of a suspicious wife. For this reason, Ethan assumes—logically, but

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perhaps foolishly—that Zeena must truly need medical attention. A more skeptical interpreter of Zeena’s trip might consider it a clever attempt to learn the true nature of Ethan’s feelings for Mattie by putting those feelings to the test. Whatever the case, Ethan seems unable even to suspect his wife of having an ulterior motive. Ethan’s attitude toward his wife lacks subtlety, as does Wharton’s portrayal of Zeena as an ugly shrew. Neither the author nor Ethan seems to have any sympathy for Zeena, and, consequently, neither do we. Zeena exists not as a complicated character but as a stumbling block to Ethan’s happiness with Mattie.

----- Chapter iv Summary As soon as Jotham and Zeena set out for Bettsbridge, Ethan departs to deliver the lumber load to Andrew Hale. During his journey, he is consumed by thoughts of his return to Mattie, imagining their first night alone together. After recounting these thoughts, the narrator segues smoothly into a description of the circumstances that surrounded Ethan’s courtship of Zeena and their subsequent marriage. When Zeena came to help Ethan nurse his mother, her arrival made him feel less lonely. Fearing the return of his loneliness when his mother died, Ethan asked Zeena to marry him. He had originally planned to sell the farm and move to a larger town, but Zeena’s illness soon rendered his dream impossible. Since he mentioned to Zeena that he would be receiving cash for the lumber load, Ethan decides to go ahead and ask Andrew Hale for a small direct payment. After unloading the lumber, Hale invites Ethan into his office, and Ethan requests an advance of fifty dollars. Hale politely refuses, citing his own financial constraints, and after a further exchange of civilities, Ethan leaves Hale to conduct some other business in the village. With the afternoon drawing to a close, the street stands relatively

empty. After an interval of solitude, a swiftly moving horse-drawn sleigh carrying Denis Eady passes Ethan and heads in the direction of the Frome farm. Ethan feels a fleeting pang of jealousy, which he quickly suppresses as unworthy of his affections for Mattie. Under the cover of the Varnum spruces, Ethan happens upon Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum, locked together in a clandestine embrace. Realizing that they are being watched, the kissing couple quickly separates and departs. Ethan is left to reminisce about the scene, which, he notes, has taken place in the very spot where he and Mattie stood hesitating the previous night. Ethan makes the long climb back to the farm. When he arrives, he looks up to see a light issuing from Mattie's bedroom. He imagines her preparing herself for supper, and he thinks back to the evening of her arrival, when she had taken such care with her appearance. On his way to the house, Ethan passes a gravestone that he has often considered a curiosity. It marks the resting place of one of his ancestors, also named Ethan Frome, as well as that of the ancestor's wife, who was named Endurance. They dwelled together in peace for fifty years, the stone announces. Ethan wonders if the same words will be written about him and Zeena. Arriving home, Ethan finds the door locked. Mattie opens it, in her usual dress but with a streak of crimson ribbon in her hair. She has carefully set the supper table for Ethan with festive treats and colorful serving dishes. After Ethan removes his outerwear, he returns to the kitchen, where Mattie has put the teakettle on the table. She playfully admits to entertaining Jotham Powell over a cup of coffee, which makes Ethan prickly slightly with jealousy. At supper, the cat jumps up onto the table, upsetting and breaking a pickle dish. The accident drives Mattie to tears, because Zeena had forbidden her ever to use the dish, a favorite wedding present of

Zeena's that came all the way from Philadelphia. Ethan confidently consoles her, balancing the fragments into a convincing whole high atop the closet, where it would be unlikely that Zeena could detect the breakage. Having averted the disaster, Ethan and Mattie settle back down at the table to finish their supper. Analysis Ethan's silent fascination with the gravestone outside his house displays the extent to which his life is permeated by the severe, Puritan notion that all human action is predetermined. As he stares at the gravestone, which memorializes the lives and fifty-year marriage of Ethan Frome and endurance his wife, Ethan believes his own fate is spelled out before him. The former Frome's wife's name seems to embody Ethan's own situation: he no longer lives life but merely endures. Although Ethan fully recognizes the obstacle that Zeena poses to his happiness, he refuses to act to rectify the situation. Although Ethan believes that the course of his own marriage is fated by the marriage of his ancestor, the narrative plays upon the relationship between past and present within Ethan's own life. When Ethan attempts to rebel against his situation, his feelings for Mattie develop in a curious replay of his earlier courtship of Zeena. First, Ethan felt he needed Zeena, a family cousin who came to care for his mother. Now, Ethan finds himself falling for Mattie, a family cousin who has come to care for his wife. The narrative plays upon this parallel when Ethan comes home from his business transaction to find the porch door locked, just as he did the previous night—only this time it is Mattie and not Zeena who comes to the door. The illusion of a man-and-wife evening is set into motion but with a difference, symbolized by the crimson ribbon in Mattie's hair. In its coloring, the ribbon refers back to the daring cherry-colored scarf that Mattie wears at the dance hall. It alludes to the scarlet letter that Hester Prynne wears to

symbolize her transgression in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic Puritan novel *The Scarlet Letter*. When the couple sits down to dinner, Wharton begins to describe the nooks and crannies of social artifice. The festive, rather impulsive-seeming, and sexually symbolic dishes Mattie has prepared—blueberries, pickles, doughnuts—indicate Mattie's awareness of the evening's clearly illicit nature. Nevertheless, Ethan and Mattie conduct the opening motions of their first supper alone with all of the elaborate gestures and rituals that might occur in the most fashionable cosmopolitan salon. Their stiff formality is shattered—literally—when the cat breaks Zeena's favorite wedding present, symbolizing the way that Mattie may break up Zeena and Ethan's marriage. Ethan's response to the broken dish is also symbolic. Rather than securing the shattered dish permanently with glue or simply throwing away the pieces and admitting that the dish has been broken, Ethan arranges the fragments into a delicate balance, postponing disaster. The dish, and his marriage, appear unbroken, but they may in fact fall to pieces with the slightest disturbance.

----- Chapters v—vi Summary: Chapter v After supper, Mattie clears up while Ethan takes a last turn around the yard. He returns to the kitchen to find Mattie busy at her sewing. Taking up his pipe, he sits down contentedly by the stove. When Ethan calls Mattie in to join him, she sits in Zeena's rocking chair, and Ethan suddenly imagines the specter of Zeena's face to have appeared in place of Mattie's features. Perhaps sensing her companion's unease and feeling uneasy herself, Mattie returns to her station in the kitchen. In time, Ethan and Mattie's disquiet begins to melt away, and they begin a carefree conversation about everyday matters—including, once again, the possibility of going sledding on the next

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moonlit night. However, when Ethan brings up his sighting of Ned and Ruth kissing among the spruces, Mattie suddenly becomes silent. Once again, Ethan and Mattie find themselves avoiding the subject that is on both of their minds—their relationship. Ethan discusses Mattie’s marriage prospects, and Mattie discusses Zeena’s ill will toward her. Dismissing the subject of Zeena, they fall silent again, until Ethan boldly places his hand on the opposite end of the piece of cloth on which Mattie is working. Mattie, in recognition of this gesture, ceases her activity and waits. The stillness is interrupted by a clatter. Behind Ethan and Mattie, the cat has leapt from Zeena’s rocking chair in pursuit of a stray mouse. This sudden reminder of Zeena oppresses Ethan, and he impulsively picks up his end of Mattie’s sewing work and kisses it gently. As he does so, the fabric slips from his hold, and he looks up to see Mattie putting away her sewing kit for the evening. The clock strikes eleven. Mattie asks about the fire, and after straightening up the room, she lights a candle and blows out the lamp. As she prepares to climb the stairs, Ethan says goodnight to her, and she responds in kind. Ethan, hearing the door to her room pull shut, realizes that he has not even touched Mattie’s hand during the course of the evening. Summary: Chapter vi At breakfast the following morning, Jotham Powell sits between Ethan and Mattie. Overnight, the wet snow has turned to sleet, creating poor road conditions and giving the men cause to load the remaining lumber at once, but delay their last actual haul until the afternoon. When Powell heads out to harness up the horses, Ethan and Mattie are left alone again, and Ethan has an urge to say, “ We shall never be alone again like this. ” He stifles it, however, and settles for telling her that he will be home for dinner. In town, after unloading the lumber, Ethan heads to the Eady store in search of some glue to fix Zeena’s

broken dish, but he can't find any there. Ethan then hastily goes to the widow Homan's store, where, after a lengthy search, he finally finds a single bottle of glue. In a driving rain, Ethan pushes his team of horses furiously toward home. When he arrives, he puts them away without a thought and dashes into the kitchen. Ethan triumphantly announces to Mattie that he has obtained the glue, but his excitement quickly dissipates when Mattie whispers that Zeena has returned—she has headed upstairs to her room without so much as a word to Mattie. Out at the barn, while Ethan feeds the horses, Powell returns to put away the sleigh. Ethan invites him to stay for supper, but Powell declines. His refusal throws Ethan into a fit of unease, and he is filled with foreboding as he goes back inside, where Mattie tells him that dinner is ready.

Analysis: Chapters v-vi

In the midst of Ethan and Mattie's unspoken feelings for one another, Zeena seems almost supernaturally present. For example, when Mattie vacates Zeena's chair uneasily, it continues to rock for a few moments, as though Zeena has reoccupied it. The mischievous cat seems to represent its absent owner, doing everything in its power to remind Mattie and Ethan of their obligations to Zeena. The cat creates general chaos by hopping up into Zeena's seat at supper and upsetting the pickle dish; later, as if to solidify its role as Zeena's ambassador, the cat jumps up into her place and watches the would-be couple with suspicious eyes. Ethan himself introduces Zeena into the room when, as Mattie sits in Zeena's rocking chair, he mentally transposes Zeena's face onto Mattie's body. This act reveals Ethan's subconscious desires and fears—although he wishes for Mattie to assume a marital role with him, he also lives in anguished torment with regard to the consequences, which embody themselves fully in the fearful appearance of

Zeena's ghostly visage. In the close confines of the familiar, lived-in room, Ethan feels trapped and paralyzed by a realm of conventions in which Mattie seems infinitely out of reach. His home carries associations of conformity, convention, and moral order, which stunt his and Mattie's conversation. This stilted conversation contrasts sharply with the free-flowing, easy conversation Ethan and Mattie enjoyed the evening before, during their nighttime walk. Ethan's attempt to overcome his shyness is, in a sense, conducted for its own sake, in revolt against the societal strictures that limit him. In the unshakable silence, Ethan's shy kiss of Mattie's sewing work is a strictly symbolic gesture, a desperate attempt to act on his emotions—to prove to himself that he is capable of doing so. When Mattie blushes at the mention of Ruth and Ned as lovers, she acknowledges the sexual tension between herself and Ethan, yet she too feels powerless to take any real action. The subject of sledding is raised a second time in Chapter V, and again it is associated with death. "There's an ugly corner down by the big elm," Ethan says. "If a fellow didn't keep his eyes open he'd go plumb into it." This assessment is foreshadowing with a vengeance, since the story ends with Mattie and Ethan sledding into that same tree, and Wharton almost seems to be hammering the reader over the head with the information. Jotham Powell's presence at breakfast in the morning tempers the tension between Ethan and Mattie. Not only is Jotham another body in the room, but, as Ethan's hired hand, Jotham symbolizes the workaday world that stands between Ethan and his dream. Significantly, during Ethan's village journey of the previous afternoon, it is Powell, not Denis Eady, who visits Mattie after delivering Zeena to her train. Eady has been positioned several times as a possible obstacle to a union between Mattie and Ethan,

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but the true obstacle is not some intrigue on Mattie's part, but the everyday world. If Mattie is unreachable, the reason is not, as Ethan fantasizes, Denis Eady. Powell's neutralizing presence, so unwanted during Zeena's absence, suddenly becomes desirable to Ethan after his wife's return. For this reason, Ethan extends a dinner invitation to Powell, hoping to diffuse the tension between him and the two women. Powell's puzzlingly abrupt refusal adds an air of impending disaster to the upcoming meal. The total change in the household's atmosphere is further registered when Mattie speaks again: her simple statement that she supposes it is time for supper bears an entirely different set of nuances than the same words held only twenty-four hours before. ----- Chapter vii Summary After

hanging up his coat, Ethan calls to Zeena but receives no reply. He goes up the stairs and opens her door, revealing a nearly dark room. Still wearing her traveling clothes, Zeena sits silently at the window. When Ethan informs her that supper is ready, she says she has no appetite. Zeena cuts short Ethan's attempts to make small talk by announcing that she is much more ill than he thinks. She tells him that in the interest of preserving her health, she has engaged the services of a new hired girl, who will arrive the following afternoon. Ethan becomes angry at this unforeseen expense, and a raging war of words ensues between him and Zeena. After a bitter haggles regarding Zeena's condition, in which she insists that she lost her health nursing his mother, Ethan resolutely declares that he lacks the funds to employ a hired girl. But, in so doing, he is caught in his own lie about the advance he had been planning to collect from Andrew Hale. When Zeena points out Ethan's inconsistency, he is somewhat shaken. Zeena then further agitates Ethan by announcing that Mattie has burdened the household for too long and will

have to leave. With Mattie's board freed up, Zeena explains, they will be able to scrape together enough money for a hired girl after all. Just at that moment, Mattie calls up from the landing to announce that supper is waiting. Zeena replies by declining her supper, and Ethan sends Mattie downstairs, promising to follow shortly. Turning back to Zeena, Ethan lamely attempts to defend Mattie. Zeena refuses to listen, proclaiming that with the hired girl's arrival, Mattie must depart. Ethan fumes with hatred, but he stops himself from expressing it. Instead, he retreats from the bedroom as Zeena prepares to lie down for the night. In the kitchen, Mattie brings a meat pie to the table, and she and Ethan once again sit down to supper alone. Ethan assures Mattie that everything is fine, but his disgust makes him unable to eat, and his dark mood produces a new wave of anxiety in Mattie. As she questions Ethan further, he rises from his seat and moves around the table to her side. With a trembling perplexity, Mattie leans toward him. As if to resolve matters, Ethan takes her into his arms and kisses her fully upon the lips. She remains in his grasp for a moment and then draws back to make sense of the situation. With a violent outburst, Ethan declares that Mattie must not go. Confused at first, Mattie soon catches his meaning and realizes that Zeena intends for her to be replaced. After sitting in silence for a while, they forlornly begin to discuss Mattie's bleak prospects for future employment. Filled with indignation, Ethan exclaims that he means to protect Mattie from dismissal and expulsion. No sooner have the rebellious words erupted than Mattie raises her hand in warning—Zeena comes in and quietly takes her seat at the table between Ethan and Mattie. Citing her need for nourishment despite her lack of appetite, Zeena starts eating her meal. Ethan sits motionless and Mattie attempts to make polite conversation. The cat rubs up

against Zeena, and she strokes it and feeds it a scrap of meat. After finishing her meal, Zeena rises from the table to find some old stomach powders. Mattie begins clearing the table, and Ethan muses that he will go outside to watch the nightfall. At the door, he meets an indignant Zeena on the verge of tears, holding the shards of the pickle dish in her hand and demanding an explanation. When pressed, Ethan blames the accident on the cat. Rushing to Ethan's defense, Mattie explains that she had taken the pickle dish down to decorate the supper table. Zeena reprimands Mattie for her sneakiness and declares that she should have turned her out long ago.

Analysis The increasing gravity of Zeena's illness—or at least what she claims is the increasing gravity of her illness—invests her with a ruthless authority in these scenes. Wharton compares Zeena's discussions of her sickness with the behavior of someone chosen for "a great fate." Zeena doesn't see her ailment as a curse; she acts as though her ability to live with suffering proves her "elect" status, her virtue, and fortitude. She casts herself as a noble martyr, telling Ethan that although anyone else would need an operation given her condition, she is willing to struggle on without one. Zeena's placement of herself in the role of a martyr is certainly Ethan's greatest obstacle in his attempt to keep Mattie, but even without Zeena claiming the higher moral ground, Ethan would be out of his depth. Zeena calls the shots because Mattie is her relative, not Ethan's. Likewise, the domestic realm is Zeena's concern, not Ethan's. Zeena's dominance within the household becomes obvious when Ethan, seething, has a sudden urge to strike at her but then inexplicably reverts to a state of passive bewilderment and meekness, retreating downstairs. Similarly, Zeena's well-timed entrance into the kitchen forces Ethan back into silence just as he has finally managed

to reveal his true feelings to Mattie. Certainly, Ethan realizes that Zeena, a chronic hypochondriac, is exaggerating the severity of her illness in order to gain the upper hand in their relationship. Nevertheless, he remains powerless to oppose her. The self-possessed Zeena so carefully crafts her statements that, though they may be lies, Ethan cannot disprove them. Ethan, on the other hand, lacks grace and articulateness. He clumsily allows Zeena to catch him in his own lie about the lumber advance, and then proves unable to cover his tracks. As Wharton squarely notes, Ethan is no good at lying, and his natural streak of honesty is a factor in his eventual inability to realize his own dreams. The broken pickle dish that Zeena discovers at the top of the china closet symbolizes the shattered Frome marriage. Mattie is partially responsible for the breaking of both the pickle dish and the marriage, having handled them carelessly, and Ethan cowardly hides the broken state of each. Significantly, though, it was the cat that actually destroyed the dish. Throughout the narrative, the cat is associated with Zeena, so the cat's destruction of the pickle dish suggests that Zeena must share responsibility for the failure of her marriage. Zeena uses the dish as an excuse to vent anger that in fact stems from the disintegration of the relationships around her. She mourns for the destruction of the dish because she cannot openly mourn the collapse of her marriage and happiness. Meanwhile, the reader is left uncertain of Mattie's feelings, because Zeena's arrival cuts short Mattie's conversation with Ethan after he kisses her. We assume that she feels the same passion that Ethan does, but her words do not betray anything. Instead of discussing the kiss, she immediately turns the conversation to Zeena and the possibility of her own departure from the household. ----- Chapter viii Summary Directly

following her outburst over the broken dish, Zeena retires upstairs to bed, and a shaken Mattie continues to clear up the kitchen. Ethan makes his usual rounds outside the house and returns to find the kitchen empty. His tobacco pouch and pipe have been laid out on the table next to a brief note in Mattie's handwriting telling him not to worry. Retreating into his makeshift study, Ethan contemplates the note over and over again, pondering a way out of his unbearable situation. Flinging aside in disgust a handmade cushion of Zeena's, Ethan mentally reviews the case of a local man who had deserted his wife in favor of the woman he loved. Encouraged by this precedent, Ethan resolves to run away with Mattie, and he prepares to write a letter of farewell to Zeena, leaving her the farm and the mill. But Ethan pauses at the prospect of starting over without any money, and he pictures the grim situation in which Zeena will be left. Slowly, he comes to the bitter recognition of his plan's impracticality, and he crumples back to the sofa in tears, falling asleep beneath the light of a large moon in the beautiful winter night sky. Ethan wakes up cold, stiff, and hungry, and rises in the knowledge that this will be Mattie's last day beneath his roof. As he stands alone in his study, he hears a step behind him and turns around to see Mattie, full of concern for his well-being after having listened all night for his return upstairs. Ethan, overwhelmed by her show of caring, lights the kitchen fire for her, and, as they sit down to a breakfast of leftovers, they decide not to worry about Zeena's threats. Ethan heads out to the cow barn, where he encounters Powell. When Powell presses to secure the details for the new hired girl's arrival and Mattie's departure, Ethan responds by saying that the matter of Mattie's dismissal is itself still unresolved. Powell reacts indifferently to this piece of news. Back in the kitchen, the men enter to find

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Mattie and Zeena seated at a full breakfast table. Zeena eats heartily, feeds scraps to the cat, and discusses departure and arrival times with Powell. She then endeavors to settle a few final matters with Mattie, as Ethan looks on wordlessly. After finishing his morning tasks, Ethan tells Powell that he is heading into town and that they should not wait for him to have dinner.

Frantically searching for a solution, Ethan decides again to ask Andrew Hale for the advance on the lumber, feeling that Hale would relent if he thought that the money would make a difference in Zeena's health. With the money, Ethan decides, he will be able to run away with Mattie and start a new life elsewhere. Aiming to intercept Hale before he departs for work, Ethan runs quickly down the hill, and spots the Hale wagon in the distance. Arriving at its side, he finds not Hale but Hale's wife in the sleigh. She informs him that Hale is resting at home for the morning, and she speaks kindly to him about his fortitude in caring for Zeena before she goes on. Mrs. Hale's

compassionate words encourage Ethan in his errand: if the Hales feel so sympathetic toward him, he thinks, surely they will advance him the cash.

But after a few paces, Ethan's conscience catches up with his fantasies, and he realizes the extent of the deception in which he is prepared to engage.

With his ethics now gaining dominance over his passions, Ethan slowly turns around and heads back to the farm. Analysis Ethan's defining characteristic in this chapter is indecision. He desperately wants to abandon Zeena but lacks the courage to do so, and he tries to convince himself that it is not his wife but financial reality that is holding him back. The novel evokes the

image of a prison contracting around him: " The inexorable facts closed in on him like prison-warders hand-cuffing a convict. There was no way out—none. "

The phrase bears much truth: in many ways Ethan is indeed a prisoner of

circumstances beyond his control. Still, a tinge of melodrama flavors his insistence that there is “no way out”; it seems that if he really wanted to elope with Mattie, he could manage it. Admittedly, such a decision would present financial difficulties, but one senses that Ethan’s cowardice and obedience to social mores, as well as his personal ethics, constitute the real forces that keep him from eloping. He uses money matters to justify his decision not to run away to the part of himself that wants to do so. As we question the sincerity of Ethan’s financial worries, we also question how realistic his assessment of his and Mattie’s relationship may actually be. Mattie’s behavior clearly demonstrates that she has feelings for Ethan, but Ethan seems to be making a large leap when he imagines her going out west with him; after all, they have shared only one kiss so far. Mattie remains more of an ideal to him, one senses, than a reality; he loves her for herself, but also because she represents an opportunity for “rebellion” against the twin tyrannies of custom and geography, which tie him to his hypochondriac wife and his snowbound farm. She is the “one ray of light,” he thinks, in the darkness of his prison, and his terror over losing her seems to be a terror at the prospect of seeing, like the Ethan Frome on the gravestone, fifty years with Zeena consume his time on earth. Until now the snowy landscape has symbolized Ethan’s spiritual oppression, with the recurring wintry imagery serving as a reminder of his status as a prisoner of Starkfield. On the morning of Mattie’s departure, however, the landscape is transformed: there is sunlight and “a pale haze of spring” over the snow, so that the wintry fields seem to hold a promise of renewal and rebirth. This promise, of course, Ethan associates with Mattie, and Wharton draws an obvious parallel between Mattie’s shining last name, Silver, and the sudden beauty adopted

by nature: “ the fields lay like a silver shield under the sun. . . . Every yard of the road was alive with Mattie’s presence. ” Again the text emphasizes Frome’s mystical connection to the natural world, as he sees the events of his own life reflected in the beauty around him. Meanwhile, Ethan’s plans continue to oscillate wildly. At night, in his study, he gives in to despair; the next day, the sun and the hint of spring seem to revive him, and he begins to plan for escape again. Yet, once again, his fears and his sense of conscience overcome him, as the unexpected kind words of Mrs. Hale are enough to thwart his temporary determination to escape from Starkfield. The theme of personal desires being repressed in favor of social order recurs here: Ethan cannot get the money that he needs from the Hales, because to do so would be to violate the complex web of duty and obligation that defines the community of Starkfield. He wants to rebel, but he cannot bring himself to do what is necessary to bring that rebellion to fruition.

----- Chapter ix Summary Arriving back home, where a sleigh has come to take away Mattie’s trunk, Ethan enters the kitchen to find Zeena reading a book of medical advice. When he asks about Mattie, Zeena tells him that she is upstairs packing. Ethan climbs the stairs and enters her room, finding Mattie sitting on her trunk in the middle of the emptied room, sobbing. She confesses her fear that she will never see him again. He reassures her, pulling her close to him and placing his lips on her hair. They are interrupted by Zeena, who calls for the trunk to be hurried down. Ethan carries it downstairs to the sleigh, and as he and Mattie watch the horse and rider depart, Ethan resolves that he, not Powell, will drive Mattie to the train. At dinner, Ethan is unable to touch his food, while Zeena eats heartily. After the meal, Powell asks what time he should return to

deliver Mattie. Ethan explains that he won't need to come to the farm at all, as Ethan himself will be delivering Mattie to the station. This sudden change of plans does not sit well with Zeena, who tells Ethan that he needs to attend to the stove in the spare bedroom. A bitter exchange ensues, and Ethan firmly insists on taking Mattie in spite of Zeena's protests. Filled with nostalgia and regret, Ethan prepares his horse for the journey. Returning to the house, he finds the kitchen empty; he eventually locates Mattie in his old study, where she explains that she had wanted to take one last look around. Zeena has retired to her bedroom after dinner without a single word of goodbye to Mattie. After casting one last glance around the kitchen, Mattie is ready to join Ethan, entering the sleigh and starting down the hill. Ethan decides to take Mattie the long way around, along Shadow Pond, in order to relive a handful of memories. Ethan stops the sleigh in a pine wood and helps Mattie down. As they walk together through the wintry landscape, they remember their encounter of the previous summer at a church picnic on this very spot, where Ethan found a lost gold locket of Mattie's. Lingered in the glow of their reminiscence, Ethan longs to reach out to Mattie and declare his affections openly, but she rises to go before he can make his move. They drive on under a setting sun, and Ethan asks Mattie about her plans for the future. She outlines a vague notion of finding work in a store. Ethan declares his devotion to her, and she responds by showing him his aborted letter of goodbye to Zeena, which he had left in his study and which Mattie had then found. Ethan is exhilarated by her discovery and asks if she has the same feelings for him that he does for her. In despair, she dismisses his question as useless, tearing up the note and casting the fragments into the snow. However, moments later, she quietly confesses her own love for him. Ethan

explains the impossibility of his situation, and Mattie insists that he write to her. Worried that she will eventually marry, Ethan asserts that he would almost sooner see her dead, and Mattie tearfully agrees with his sentiment. As they drive, they come across a group of boys with sleds, which reminds them of their long-harbored plan to go sledding. Suddenly, Ethan proposes that they embark on their sledding adventure right away, reassuring Mattie that the hired girl can wait for them at the station. Sighting a sled beneath the Varnum spruces, they make their way over to it and climb aboard. They finish their first run smoothly, though they narrowly miss the elm that stands at the foot of the first slope. As they climb back up the hill together, Ethan is struck with the thought that these are their last moments in each other's company. At the top of the hill, Mattie breathlessly asks Ethan if this was the same place where he once saw Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum kiss each other, and she embraces him in a kiss of their own. As they say their goodbyes—still refusing to accept them as goodbyes—and kiss again, the church clock strikes five. Unable to bear the prospect of parting from Ethan, Mattie solemnly requests that Ethan steer the sled so they coast directly into the elm tree and die together. Ethan's initial astonishment quickly gives way to his own desire to escape a future without Mattie. Locked in a lover's embrace once again, Ethan holds Mattie close and feels her sobbing, as the train whistle sounds. The two pile onto the sled together, with Ethan sitting in front, and Ethan sets the sled into its fatal motion. As they hurtle down the hill, Ethan feels confident that they will hit the tree, but at the last moment he swerves unexpectedly, as he seems to see Zeena's malignant face before him. The sled glides off in a second of uncertainty before he rights it on its course again. They then hit the elm. Ethan, dazed from the impact, hears the faint

noises of what he takes to be a small animal in pain, and he makes a weakened effort to attend to it. After removing a heavy mass from on top of him, he reaches out to feel what he discovers to be Mattie's hair and face. Rising to his knees, he bends down toward Mattie's face, seeing her eyes open and hearing her utter his name. He moans softly back to her. Hearing his horse whinny at the top of the hill, he is brought back to the world and the duties that face him there. Analysis From the beginning of this chapter the sense of despair and desperation begins to mount, with time running out for Ethan and Mattie. In this somber mood, the sense of unavoidable doom grows, and the narrative builds up to its dramatic climax. In his emotional strain, Ethan finds himself seemingly guided by the invisible force of destiny: Wharton describes him feeling as though his heart were tied with cords being tightened by the hand of fate. Due to this "unseen hand," Ethan relinquishes responsibility for his own actions, pursuing his errand with Mattie as though directed by a greater force. In a heartbeat, Ethan's notions of ethical responsibility have dissipated, and his entire sense of accountability vanishes along with it. The dynamics between Mattie and Ethan change subtly now as Mattie, for the first time in the book, seizes the initiative in their interactions: she takes the bold step of revealing her knowledge of Ethan's forsaken plan to elope with her and the even bolder step of confessing her own longtime love for Ethan. Yet the declaration brings no real happiness: now that we know that Ethan's passion is not one-sided, Mattie's imminent departure takes on an infinitely more tragic dimension. At the same time, Mattie's daring seems to bring out a dangerously reckless quality in Ethan, as he gives in to a sudden impulse and proposes the sledding adventure. In light of the book's final

circumstances, Ethan's inner thoughts in this scene create a sense of bitter irony. Poised at the top of the hill for their first run, Ethan's playful reassurance to Mattie that he could go down the hill with his eyes closed foreshadows their impending deliberate crash. Moreover, Ethan's wish to keep Mattie with him forever will attain a terrible form of realization when Mattie is paralyzed in the ensuing crash and forced to stay with the Fromes indefinitely. Similarly, Ethan's thought that their ascent up the hill will be the last time they walk together also bears a grave dramatic irony: they will never walk together again, as it turns out, not because Mattie is leaving him, but because she will soon be unable to walk at all. Part of the genius of Ethan Frome is the way that the sledding run works as a metaphor for Ethan's inability to make the decisions necessary to solve his dilemma. Sledding is an activity in which the rider submits to the forces of gravity and friction: a certain amount of steering can alter the course, and some riders steer better than others, but the rider can always choose to give in to momentum and simply coast. Giving in is exactly what Ethan does in agreeing to Mattie's suicidal wish: he frees himself of the burdens of his situation and makes the decision to coast, putting his life and hers in the hands of fate. In many ways, this notion of coasting also applies to Ethan's general approach to life: believing himself to be imprisoned by external contingencies—by the landscape, financial circumstances, and social conventions—he relinquishes responsibility time and again. So, too, does the sledding run fit perfectly with the nature of Ethan and Mattie's love, which is illicit and reckless, and so seems to call for a reckless conclusion. This ending feels destined to the characters as well as to the reader: in considering Mattie's death wish, Ethan reflects that Mattie seems to be speaking for fate

itself. It is as though he has no other choice but to comply with her bold proposal. In keeping with his mystical outlook, Ethan comes to believe that the natural world around him has somehow sanctioned their decision: as the sled hurtles violently toward the elm, Ethan observes that the elm seems to be waiting for them, as though it knows what will happen. But the sledding run, as it turns out, is not an escape of any kind. Wharton leaves it ambiguous whether Ethan's swerve, brought about by his vision of Zeena, is what prevents them from dying or whether even a head-on collision is not enough to kill them. In either case, the world has conspired to prevent Ethan and Mattie from escaping, and now the book's dominant themes reemerge as strongly as ever: the conflict between human desires and the external circumstances, be they geographical or social. Wharton had provided the first foreshadowing of the smash-up at the outset of the story, when the narrator heard vague descriptions of Ethan's unfortunate accident from several reluctant village sources. Combined with the later references to sledding accidents, Ethan's pronounced disfigurement in the opening pages of the novel clues the reader in to Ethan's impending tragedy. Nevertheless, the grip of Wharton's rustic romance is so strong as to fog the memory of even the most perceptive first-time readers; we read of the disaster in near disbelief, and no amount of preparation seems adequate to dampen the emotional impact of the literal collision. -----

Conclusion Entering Frome's kitchen, the narrator is unable to tell which of the two women in the room had been speaking upon the men's arrival. Both are slight and gray-haired, and one starts preparing the evening meal as the other sits huddled in the corner by the stove. The narrator observes the marked poverty and squalor of the place, and Frome notes the coldness of

the room with a tone of -apology. The woman in the corner attempts to explain, blaming the other woman for having only just started the fire. The narrator then recognizes the whining voice he heard previously as the voice of the seated woman. As the other woman comes back around to the table to set a pie in place, Frome introduces her to the narrator as his wife and then proceeds to introduce the seated woman as Miss Mattie Silver. The next morning, the narrator returns to his lodgings, to the great relief of Mrs. Hale, who had given him up for dead. Mrs. Hale and her mother, Mrs. Varnum, are most surprised to learn of Frome's exceeding generosity toward the narrator, and they react with downright amazement at his announcement that he has spent the night at the Frome household. The narrator senses a strong hint of curiosity in the two women regarding Frome's hospitality. Mrs. Hale submits that she has spent a great deal of time visiting the Fromes, but for the last twenty years hardly anyone but herself and their doctors has ever set foot in the household. After supper, Mrs. Varnum retires for the evening, and Mrs. Hale and the narrator sit in the parlor for a further conversation about the Fromes. Mrs. Hale begins to recount the terrible aftermath of the smash-up, but the mere memory of Mattie's convalescence suffices to bring her to tears. Gathering her wits, Mrs. Hale continues with her tale, describing to the narrator Zeena's mysteriously silent reaction to the events and her gracious decision to receive Mattie back into their household as soon as she could be moved. Responding to the narrator's gentle queries, Mrs. Hale explains that Mattie has lived with the Fromes ever since and that Zeena has done much of the caretaking for the three of them. Expressing pity for them and marveling at their resilience, Mrs. Hale seems to have concluded her account; however, she then collects herself to make one final remark.

Removing her spectacles and leaning toward the narrator in confidence, she declares in a lowered voice that Mattie would have been better off dying after the accident, for, as it stands, " 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. " Analysis In this brief epilogue, Wharton summons us back to the present, resuming the narrator's description of his visit to the Frome household. The result is an abrupt and curtailed view of Frome's plight, of which we now hold a background understanding. As she did in the novel's opening scenes, Wharton once again delays the revelation of character, describing the individuals at hand before she names them. From the neutral narrator's description, it is initially difficult to tell which woman is which, and when we hear that one speaks in a " whine, â