

## **The Prologue**

1. a. In what point of view is this story first told?  
b. Who is the narrator?
2. Describe Ethan as he is first seen by the narrator:
3. Why has Ethan remained in Starkfield?
4. What metaphors does the narrator use to describe winter in Starkfield?
5. How does the narrator finally meet Ethan Frome?
6. What is the narrator able to learn about Ethan during their daily rides?
7. a. What happened to Ethan's father?  
b. Who else was not well?
8. Describe the Frome house as seen by the narrator:
9. To what does Ethan attribute his mother's death?
10. a. What does Ethan offer the narrator?  
b. How did the narrator know there was someone in the house?

## **Chapter I.**

1. How has the point of view changed?
2. List 3 things the reader learns about Ethan:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
3. What does Ethan think of Denis Eady?
4. Why does Zenobia (Zeena) take Mattie into her house?
5. What do you think is wrong with Zeena?
6. How does Ethan feel about escorting Mattie?
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. How do you think Ethan truly feels about Mattie?

## **Chapter II**

1. Why does Ethan stay in the shadows when the people come out of the church?
2. Why does Ethan's heart "...tremble back to safety" when she doesn't get in the sleigh with Eady?
3. a. Explain what Mattie is referring to when she says, "Wouldn't it have been too awful?"
  - b. What literary device might this be an example of?

4. Why does Mattie think Zeena has a right to be unhappy with her?
5. How does Ethan react when Mattie remarks about him wanting her to go?
6. a. Before this night, how had Ethan felt about the Frome gravestones?  
  
b. How has that changed?
7. 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?
8. a. What does the reader learn about Zeena?  
  
b. Describe Zeena:
9. What does Zeena mean when she says, "I just felt so mean I couldn't sleep"?
10. What did Ethan not want Mattie to see?
11. Why did Ethan decide to go upstairs?

### Chapter III

1. Why does Ethan do his clearest thinking in the mornings?
2. What does Ethan regret not doing (he thinks of this as he lies in bed)?
3. Why was Zeena and the rest of the “clan” unhappy with Orin?
4. How old was Mattie when she was left on her own in the world?
5. a. What kinds of things can Mattie do?  
b. At what was she *not* successful?
6. Knowing that Mattie has nowhere to go, how does Zeena behave towards her?
7. What does Ethan hope Mattie will do but is afraid of the result?
8. What does Ethan produce at his mill?
9. Why doesn't Ethan want to deliver the load to Hale himself?
10. a. Where is Zeena going?  
b. Why does she usually make these trips?  
c. Why does Ethan dread them?  
d. In what is Zeena wholly absorbed?
11. Why is Ethan *really* happy that Jotham will drive Zeena?
12. a. How old is Ethan?  
b. How old is Zeena?  
c. Do you think the age difference matters? Why?
13. When Zeena says she'll use the empty medicine jars for pickles, what characteristic of her personality becomes clear?

## **Chapter IV**

1. Before, the house and environment were cold. How are things described now that Zeena is gone?
2. Why did Ethan want to finish work as soon as possible?
3. On his way into town, Ethan does certain things to let the reader know that he feels happy. Name one:
4. When he was in college, what did people call him that made him feel accepted?
5. Because his parents were both sick, Ethan had to give up any social life. What did his mother stop doing that made him feel even more alone?
6. a. How are Ethan and Zeena related?  
b. Why did she come to Starkfield?
7. a. Why was Ethan so attracted to Zeena when she first came?  
b. 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 did the newlywed Ethan and Zeena originally plan to do?
10. What had Ethan always wanted to be?
11. Zeena did not want to live on an isolated farm in Starkfield, but why wouldn’t she move to a bigger town?

12. a. What would she have suffered in a city?
  - b. What did she develop?
  - c. Why was she such a skilled nurse?
13. Why didn't Ethan speak much to her?
14. Why does he have trouble asking Hale for an advance?
15. Why is Ethan so jealous when he sees Eady heading toward his house?
16. How does Mattie seem different when he returns home?
17. Explain what the narrator means by the following line (which refers to Zeena):

“The name threw a chill between them, and they stood a moment looking sideways at each other...”
18. Even though Zeena is gone, how is the cat symbolic of her presence?
19. a. What happens to the pickle dish?
  - b. Why is Mattie concerned?
  - c. What does Ethan plan to do to remedy the situation?
20. 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 are two of the things Ethan and Mattie talked about once they became comfortable being alone together?  
(1)  
(2)

4. What did Ethan imagine?

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

6. Why didn't they go coasting?

When do they plan to?

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

Why?

8. What literary element might be in use here?

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

10. What did Ethan imagine might happen as a result of their conversation about a young couple kissing in the shadows?
11. How did Mattie react the night before, when Ethan put his arm around her?
12. What does Ethan comment about her future?
13. Whom does he think is responsible for such a thought?
14. In what way did it seem that Zeena was present even though she was away?
15. What does Ethan do that may be surprising?
16. What does he remember he had not ever done?

## **Chapter VI**

1. What kind of “vision” had Mattie and Ethan’s evening together given Ethan?
2. a. What did Ethan want to say to Mattie before he went to work?  
  
b. Why couldn’t he say it?



3. a. What was the first thing that went wrong (when Ethan went out to work)?  
  
b. The second?
4. What effect does the atmosphere of the sleety rain have on the feeling of this chapter?
5. Ethan's ability to get to the farm with the glue before Zeena's return depended on what two things?
  - a)
  - b)
6. Why couldn't Ethan buy glue at Eady's store?
7. How is Ethan's plan to mend the dish ruined when he arrives home?
8. Why didn't Ethan realize Zeena was home?
9. Now that Zeena was home, how did the kitchen look to Ethan?
10. Why didn't they know how Zeena did at the doctor's?
11. a. Why does Ethan *really* want Jotham to stay for supper?  
  
b. Why does Jotham NOT want to stay for supper?
12. What two things does Ethan come up with to account for Zeena's behavior?

## Chapter VII

1. Even though they have a usual routine at the house, what does Zeena do to show that things are not like usual anymore?
2. How does Zeena explain the condition of her health?
3. What does Zeena say the new doctor told her she needs?
4. What does Zeena say she needs?
5. About what do Ethan and Zeena argue?
6. Upon what does she blame her health?
7. What is surprising about their “scene of open anger”?
8. An almshouse is a place for poor people. How does Zeena insult Ethan when she says, “Better send me to the almshouse and be done with it. I guess there’s been Fromes there afore now”?
9. How does Ethan propose Zeena won’t have to “lift a hand”?
10. What is Zeena’s excuse for getting rid of Mattie?
11. What does Ethan say in order to shame her into keeping Mattie on?
12. When is the new girl supposed to arrive?  
  
So, then, when must Mattie leave?

13. 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"

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

15. Why is he overcome with shame? (p. 96)

16. What do both Mattie and Ethan know is true about Zeena?

17. What comes distinctly for the first time for Mattie? (p. 97)

18. How has Zeena changed from the first part of this chapter?

19. Briefly explain how Zeena finds the broken dish:

20. What does Zeena cruelly say about Mattie's character?

21. When Zeena carries the broken dish out of the room, it is noted that she carries the pieces "as if she carried a dead body..." Knowing how important that dish was to her, and how she treats it so gently, what do you think this dish could be a symbol of, which also has now broken? (Think of something intangible that also has been destroyed.)

## **Chapter VIII**

1. What did Ethan make out of the room his mother gave him?
2. a. Why did Mattie write, “Don’t trouble Ethan”?  
  
b. Why did the note mean so much to Ethan?
3. How was Zeena described in the fourth paragraph?
4. 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?
5. What was he going to tell Zeena in the note? Explain briefly:
6. What is the first reason why his plan won’t work?
7. There are 3 reasons why he was afraid to go out West. List 2 of them:
  - a.
  
  
  - b.
8. What was “the alternative” to leaving Zeena and the farm?

9. What did Ethan realize after he found the paper advertising the trips?
10. Once Ethan realizes there “was no way out – none” he describes himself as:
11. What was Ethan supposed to have done that night?
12. What did Ethan think when he woke up?
13. How did Mattie know where Ethan was?
14. Ethan tells Mattie to \_\_\_\_\_ Zeena when she sees her.
15. Of what did Zeena accuse Mattie?
16. Why was Ethan not going to be at dinner?
17. What did Ethan first think was a solution to his problem?
18. Who was in Hale’s sleigh?
19. What did Mrs. Hale say that made Ethan feel “less alone with his misery”?
20. Why couldn’t Ethan ask Andrew for money after all?

## Chapter IX

1. What was Zeena reading when Ethan entered the kitchen looking for Mattie and what does it say about how she feels?
2. What two words describe how Mattie's room looks?
3. Why was Mattie crying when Ethan entered her room?
4. What was Zeena's reaction when Ethan appeared with Mattie's trunk?
5. a. Who was supposed to take Mattie to the train?  
b. What does Ethan decide instead?  
c. How does Zeena react to that?
6. Do you think the furnace really needs fixing? Why or why not?
7. Why is Mattie in Ethan's study?
8. How did Zeena say goodbye to Mattie?
9. Where did Ethan head instead of Starkfield?
10. To what did the term "shy secret spot" refer?
11. Explain the significance of the spot:
12. What season was this memory? Why is that significant?
13. What brief illusion did Ethan have?

14. Why can't he tell Mattie what he was thinking?
15. Why doesn't Ethan want Mattie to get a job in a store?
16. a. What did Mattie show Ethan?  
b. What did Mattie now know that she had not realized back at the farm?
17. What did Ethan want Mattie to tell him?
18. How long has Mattie thought romantically of Ethan?
19. 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?
20. 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.)
21. What things do they talk about in order to get "through their miserable last hour"?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
22. What do they decide to do before going to the station?
23. What did Ethan say about his ability to navigate the hill in the dark?
24. What was the ride like?
25. To what was Ethan referring when he bragged, "But I can measure distances to a hair's-breath – always could"?
26. Think back to all of the times the elm tree was mentioned prior to this moment in the book. Speculate what you think will happen:

27. Despite their momentary happiness, what did Ethan say to himself with every step of their climb?

28. What happens in the same place where Ethan thought he had seen Ned and Ruth on the night he went to pick up Mattie from the church dance?

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

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

31. What was Ethan's initial reaction?

32. 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.

33. What made Ethan's vision of the house he was going back to "more intolerable to return to..."?

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

35. Did Ethan still think Mattie's suggestion was crazy?

36. As Mattie tugged at Ethan's hand, she seems to be "the embodied instrument of fate." (p. 131) What do you think this means?

37. a. What do you think Mattie first thought when Ethan told her to get up from the sled?

b. What did he actually mean to do?

c. Why?

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



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

39. What did Ethan mean by, “We can fetch it; I know we can fetch it –“?

40. What caused the sled to swerve?

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

42. What do you think “seemed to be lying on him”?

What was it?

43. Which of them was the most badly hurt?

How do you know?

44. Speculate: Why would Ethan 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 26-134?

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

4. How was Mattie like Zeena?

5. Why did Ruth Hale stop going often to the Frome farm?

6. What made her feel bad when she visited the Frome farm?

7. Where was Mattie brought after the accident?

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

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

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

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

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

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