

# **All About Eve Film Summary**

**All About Eve by Joseph L. Mankiewicz**

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## Context

*All About Eve* is a classic film about the competition in the theater industry. Eve Harrington is a young woman who has become obsessed with Margo Channing, the most successful actress in New York. One night, she finally meets Margo, tells her sad story, and begins her climb to fame.

Eve begins to study Margo, and she eventually becomes like Margo in many ways. After manipulating some of the situations in her life, Eve finally gets the chance to perform in Margo's place at an opening. When Margo receives a bad review from Addison, a critic, she is crushed, and Eve's dreams begin to come true. Finally, Eve gets the opportunity to star in her own play. Eve also tries to steal Karen's husband.

Addison discovers that Eve's entire story has been a fake from the beginning, and he takes her to task. Addison decides that he owns her and forces her to let Karen's husband go. Everyone finally readjusts to their normal lives, but Eve becomes spoiled and selfish. After winning a major award, she returns home like a spoiled brat and finds a young woman just like herself waiting to help her, and someday take her place.

Joseph L. Mankiewicz was an award-winning screenwriter and director. Mankiewicz directed 12 Oscar-winning performances by such actors as Marlon Brando, Laurence Olivier, and Katherine Hepburn. Mankiewicz directed such films as *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Guys and Dolls* (1955), *The Quiet American* (1958), and *Cleopatra* (1963).

After appearing in *The Man Who Played God* (1932), Bette Davis became a major star. Davis also appeared in *Of Human Bondage* (1934), *Dangerous* (1935), and *Jezebel* (1938). After these films, her career declined, until she appeared in *All About Eve*, *The Virgin Queen* (1955), and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* (1962); before the latter, she put a famous job-wanted ad in the industry papers.

Anne Dexter plays the role of Eve in the film. Anne's first good film was *The North Star* (1943). In 1946, she won the Best Supporting Actress Academy Award for her role in *The Razor's Edge*. After *All About Eve*, Anne's career really took off with the role of Nefertari in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), and *Cimarron* (1960).

George Sanders plays the role of Addison DeWitt in *All About Eve*. Sanders performed in over 100 films, and his friends believed that the role of Addison best fit his personality; it was as though Sanders was playing himself. Sanders also appeared in *Rebecca* (1940), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *Ivanhoe* (1952), *From the Earth to the Moon* (1958), and *The Jungle Book* (1967) as the voice of the tiger, Shere Khan.

*All About Eve* was nominated for eight Academy Awards: Best Actress in a Leading Role for Anne Baxter; Best Actress in a Leading Role for Bette Davis; Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Celeste Holm; Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Thelma Ritter;

Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black-and-White for Lyle R. Wheeler, George W. Davis, Thomas Little, and Walter M. Scott; Best Cinematography, Black-and-White for Milton R. Krasner; Best Film Editing for Barbara McLean; and Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture for Alfred Newman. The film actually won Academy Awards in six areas: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for George Sanders; Best Costume Design, Black-and-White for Edith Head and Charles Le Maire; Best Director for Joseph L. Mankiewicz; Best Picture for Darryl F. Zanuck; Best Sound, Recording; and Best Writing, Screenplay for Joseph L. Mankiewicz.

# Summary and Analysis

When *All About Eve* begins, a man speaks about the Sarah Sidons Award. An older gentleman, an actor, is speaking at the awards ceremony. The minor awards for writer and director have already been awarded, but Eve, *All about Eve*, will be discussed later. The man introduces himself as Addison DeWitt, a critic and commentator. Addison is there with Karen Richards, the wife of playwright Lloyd Richards. Margo Channing is also there, and she is one of the best actresses of his time. Finally, the man up front begins to present the award to Miss Eve Harrington, a young woman who has spent her life wanting to make it on the stage.

Eve is the girl-next-door and has been the fascination of the public. DeWitt says that everyone believes they know all about Eve, and asks what they don't know. Karen begins thinking of a time the previous October when she looks for Eve, a young girl who waits outside the theater each night to see Margo Channing. Eve finally gathers the courage to speak to Karen, and Karen is shocked to learn that Eve has seen every performance. Karen decides that Eve must be introduced to Margo. Karen takes her inside.

At Margo's door, Karen goes in to talk to Margo and Karen's husband. They also talk with another actress. Margo complains about wanting other parts, and Karen tries to explain that Margo should be nicer to her fans. Margo tells the maid to get rid of her, and Karen begs Margo to meet her. Margo even knows who she is, and Karen brings Eve inside. Margo puts on a show as though she is a good friend to Birdie, the maid, and others. Eve tells everyone that Mrs. Channing is her hero. Lloyd can't believe that Eve has seen every performance of his play, and Eve tells them she would have nowhere else to go.

Karen invites Eve to tell them about her life, and Birdie comes in to hear the story as well. Eve says everything began when she saw the play *Remembrance* in San Francisco and went to every performance. After the show left, she followed. Eve then says that in Wisconsin she was with her parents, because she was an only child. Eve's activities such as acting and make believe began to take up her whole life. Eve quit school, went to Milwaukee, and became a secretary in a brewery so that she could help her family at home.

Eve became involved in a theater group there. Eve met Eddie, an actor, but he was sent to war right after they were married. One week, Eddie wrote about his leave, and she went to San Francisco to meet him. While there, she got a telegram that he had died, so she just stayed in San Francisco. One night, she went to see Margo's play, and she ended up in New York watching the shows. Everyone is in tears at the end of Eve's story.

Suddenly, a gentleman, Bill Sampson, bursts in and lectures Margo about not being ready to go yet. Bill introduces himself to Eve, and then she prepares to leave. Everyone asks her to stay, and Margo invites her to come talk later. Lloyd and Karen



leave, telling everyone else goodbye. Karen tells Eve she would like to see her again as a friend, and Eve thanks her for her kindness.

While Eve and Bill wait on Margo, Eve asks about Bill's trip to Hollywood. Eve can't understand why Bill would want to go to Hollywood. Bill tells her that the theater is a flea circus, and she tries to warn him that so few people return from working in the movies. Birdie wishes Bill good luck, and they leave. At the station, Eve offers to take care of everything so that Bill and Margo can have some time alone. Margo has developed a protective feeling toward Eve. Bill and Margo embrace, and she asks whether she will lose him. Then, Eve reappears. Bill says goodbye and tells Eve to take care of Margo.

During that night, they sent for Eve's things and she moved in with Margo. Margo adored Eve while she took care of her in the first few weeks, but Birdie is disgusted. One night, while Margo takes all her bows, Eve cries after the final scene, as always. Eve informs Margo that she has now made new curtains for the dressing room. After she takes something to the wardrobe mistress, Birdie tells Margo that the wardrobe women in the union are very picky. They only have two jobs: to carry clothes and fix them, so Margo tells Eve to let them pick up the clothes. When she goes to tell her, she finds Eve holding the dress up to herself and taking a bow.

In the middle of the night, Margo receives a call so that she can make the call she placed to Bill. Margo is so confused, and he thanks her for calling him. Bill lets her know that he will be returning in a week, and she can't wait until he comes home. Bill won't let her hang up until she tells him "Happy Birthday!" Bill tells Margo that Eve wrote him about the party and tells her to check with Eve for the list of people to invite. Margo seems a little annoyed, but she tries not to show it.

The next morning, Margo asks Birdie why she doesn't like Eve. Birdie tells Margo that Eve seems to be studying Margo, as though she was a set of blueprints. At that moment, Eve comes in wearing Margo's suit. Margo sends Eve off with the script for a production and for some income tax information. Margo then asks about the call Eve planned for Bill, and Eve apologizes for not telling her. Eve also reveals that she sent him a telegram as well. Margo and Birdie exchange a look when Eve leaves.

That evening, Margo remembers Bill's disastrous welcome home party. While she gets ready, she feels that things are going to go badly. Birdie tells Margo that Bill has been there for twenty minutes, but Eve has cornered him downstairs. Margo sends Eve away so that she can properly welcome Bill home. Bill seems disturbed by Margo's attitude, and they spend a few minutes talking. Bill becomes angry at Margo for her ridiculous attitude. Margo is no longer convinced that Eve is innocent, and Bill becomes angry with her and refuses to reassure her about their relationship. Eve reappears, dripping with kindness, and Bill goes to get a drink for Margo, and Eve asks for the exact same drink. Eve greets Karen and Lloyd and the other guests.

Margo then goes in to speak to them. Lloyd and Karen suspect that something big is about to happen, because of Margo's mood. Addison shows up at the party as well, and he greets Eve. Everyone loves Eve, and Margo quickly becomes insanely jealous.

Margo is in a horrible mood for the entire night. Max, a friend, tells Margo about the difficulty he's having with choosing an actress for the part of Margo's sister. Margo then asks him to take Eve on for a job, and he agrees. Later, Lloyd tells Margo that he is concerned about her, and she reminds him that her age is an issue in the next play.

A Hollywood movie star has arrived at the party, and Eve takes the woman's coat upstairs. Karen talks to her, and Eve gushes about how kind Margo has been. Eve asks Karen to help her get the job as Margo's new understudy. Eve pretends to be concerned about having to perform, but Karen agrees to the idea. Birdie then walks in to get the coat of the lady from Hollywood. Downstairs, Addison philosophizes on the different world in which actors and celebrities live. Bill, on the other hand, along with Eve, believes that dedication and craft is most important in the theater. Eve is convinced that the applause of the audience is worth any sacrifice.

Karen and Lloyd prepare to leave, and Karen lectures Margo on her constant act, even in her own home. Disgusted with everyone, Margo goes to bed. Bill follows her upstairs, and Addison is disappointed to be missing the next act. Eve seems upset, and Karen tries to comfort her. They leave, and Eve reminds Karen of her promise.

Margo walks in and Addison tells her that the audition is already over. He informs Margo that Eve is her new understudy, that she had read her part for the audition. Margo is extremely angry over the turn of events, and Addison tells her that Eve's brilliant performance outshone that of any of the people auditioning. Addison warns her that Eve will someday be as good as she, and Lloyd was blown away. Addison leaves, and Margo enters the theater.

Lloyd and Bill are talking to Eve when Margo comes in, and she pretends to have no idea what is happening. Bill tells Margo that everything is over, and she asks about the audition. Max, the producer, looks very uncomfortable with the situation. Eve thanks Margo for not showing up so that she could read. Eve tries to reassure Margo while Lloyd tells her how wonderful is. Margo repeats his own words to him, and Lloyd confronts her about playing a game with him. Margo is angry for being lied to and attacked. Lloyd yells at her and barges out of the theater. Margo threatens to let him trade her, and Max threatens her with legal action.

Bill and Margo then get in an argument as well, when he tells her that he didn't know Eve was the understudy until that afternoon. Bill tells Margo that he loves her, but she has to stop hurting them with her outbursts. Bill explains that he is tired of playing her games, and he finally says goodbye. When he leaves, Margo asks if he's going to find Eve.

Lloyd goes home to tell Karen about Margo's outburst. Lloyd is thrilled with Eve, and Karen then tells him that the two of them, along with Margo and Bill, are heading out together the next day. Karen says that her big idea about how to give Margo a boot in the rear came to her while on the couch. Karen planned a joke on Margo that would help everyone. Karen calls Eve, and then describes the horrible weekend when Bill didn't come.

On their way home, the three run out of gas on the way to the station for Margo to catch her train to New York. Lloyd gets out and walks, so that he can try to find help. Margo apologizes to Karen for the way she has treated them. Margo also explains that she loves Bill, but if she can't figure out who she is, how can he love her? Margo also apologizes for the way she's treated Eve. Margo explains that she just wanted to give what Eve has to Bill. Karen then apologizes to Margo for the trick she has played.

That night, Eve was wonderful during the play, which Addison explains. Addison also tells that he and other newspapermen were called by Eve to attend just that afternoon. Most people wanted to return to see Margo, but those who stayed enjoyed Eve. Addison stands outside the door and hears Bill and Eve talking. Bill tells her that she will be a good actress in time, and Eve tells him not to run away from her. Bill proclaims that he is still in love with Margo, and he tells Eve that he goes after what he wants; he doesn't want things, or women, to come after him.

After Eve throws off her wig in a rage, Addison comes in the scene. Eve composes herself, and he flatters her, by telling her to blow her own horn a little more. Addison suggests that he can help her and offers to take her to dinner. With some questioning, he discovers that Eve's entire story has been false from the beginning: her home, her marriage, and her trip to San Francisco. Eve then comes out in a towel and tells him to take charge of the evening.

Karen narrates a section telling us how all the newspapers carried the story of Eve's performance. The next day, Karen has lunch with Margo, runs into Eve and Addison, and Eve shares the information that she has an interview with a movie producer. Addison hands Karen his review of the play, and she is shocked by what he has written. Eve realizes that Margo will not be coming, and she heads to Margo's place. Margo plans to put an end to the chaos.

Suddenly, Bill appears in the apartment. Bill ran the entire way after reading Addison's "filth." Bill embraces Margo, and Karen leaves. Lloyd later tells Karen how angry he is with Addison, and that Eve has been to see him, telling him about how Addison manipulated her words. Lloyd suggests immediately doing *Footsteps on the Ceiling* with Eve and sending Margo on tour. Karen explains to Lloyd that Eve is manipulative, and she doesn't want her to play the part. In the middle of the argument, Margo rings up to have them meet her and Bill later. Lloyd explains that he would never make the change without Karen's approval.

That night, the four have dinner at a nice restaurant, and Bill raves about Margo's performance. Apparently, Eve gave notice that day. Then, Bill gives a toast to Margo, his bride to be. Everyone rejoices over the good news. Karen then receives a note from Eve to meet her. Margo grabs the empty champagne bottle and spots Addison. Karen doesn't want to see her, and they beg her to find out what has happened.

In the bathroom, Eve convinces Karen to sit down and talk. Eve says that Addison manipulated her into saying the things that went into the article. Karen tells her not to get overdramatic, and Eve reports that she has been told off all around town by Margo's





loyal friends. Eve begins to pretend to cry, and Karen softens. Eve claims to want her friends back, rather than Addison. Eve begs Karen to tell Lloyd to give her the part she wants in the play. Eve threatens her with the information that Addison knows about Karen's plot to keep Margo from the opening night. Eve realizes that no one would ever trust them again if the story got out, and they would lose their best friends. Eve says she would do almost anything for such a good part. Margo sits in shock when Eve leaves. At their table, Eve tells Addison that she desperately needs him.

At the dinner table, Karen is terribly upset, until Margo says that she doesn't want to play Cora. Margo will now have a life as a married lady, and she wants to leave it at that. Karen bursts out laughing, everyone gives her strange looks, and Margo takes away her champagne.

In the next scene, we see that Eve is indeed playing Cora. Though Bill, at first, refused to direct the play, Lloyd and Max convince him. Bill and Lloyd fight terribly over Eve though, and the way she acted. Lloyd constantly messed with Bill's direction, and Karen eventually decided to skip rehearsals for good. Karen felt completely helpless, except to love her husband. Her husband was used to everything he loved about her. One night, the woman living across from Eve calls Lloyd. The woman had seen them together and thought he should know that Eve is hysterical. Lloyd prepares to go right over to Eve's, and Karen looks at him sadly. The girl then walks out and gives Eve, who is fine, the okay sign.

Addison is with Eve on the day she makes her opening at the theater in New Haven. Eve is thrilled at her chance to open in a big performance. Eve is excited to be starting down the new road of her life. Eve invites him into her room and tells him that Max is paying for her suite at Lloyd's suggestion. Lloyd has put champagne in her room for his own pleasure. Eve shares with him that not only would she succeed in the theater that night, but she will get Lloyd as well, because he is leaving Karen. Addison refuses to believe that Eve loves him, and he realizes that Lloyd is the perfect conquest for this young, soon-to-be-successful actress. Eve also says that Karen doesn't know about the marriage yet, but Addison knows that Karen is a smart woman. Addison says no one else will ever be like Eve, and he is disgusted with her manipulation.

Addison is insulted that she seems to have contempt for him just like everyone else, and he refuses to be her fool. Addison informs Eve that Lloyd will not leave Karen for Eve, because he will not allow it. Addison tells her that she will belong to him. Eve laughs in his face, and he slaps her. Eve threatens to have him thrown out, but he tells her not to touch the phone.

Addison then informs her that he knows her real name is Gertrude, her parents are poor and haven't heard from her in three years. Eve's work in the brewery was less boring than she claimed, because her boss's wife had her followed. After being forced out of town, she came directly to New York with \$500 paid her. Eve runs into the other room, and Addison follows her. Eve's husband never existed, and he knows that she has never been to San Francisco.

Addison also knows that she blackmailed Karen, and Karen told him the truth about his article. Addison is amazed that he wants her at all, but they share contempt for humanity and insatiable ambition. Eve admits that she now belongs to him. After he leaves, Eve says that she won't go on that night, but Addison then says she gave the performance of her life and we are transferred to the beginning of the film and the awards ceremony.

Eve gives a pretty little speech at the ceremony and continues her pretend life of being modest. Eve thanks the theater and her friends there. Eve gives credit to Max, Karen, Margo, Bill, and Lloyd: not one seems impressed with her sentiment. Eve then announces that she is going to Hollywood to make a film, but she still loves the theater. Everyone gives her a wonderful round of applause. Lloyd gets a small award and gives it to Karen for all her difficulties with him. Eve goes to Addison and receives congratulations from others. Margo tells her that she can put that award where her heart should be. Addison suggests that Eve can get a drink at Max's, and she doesn't want to go. Max's big party is thrown in honor of the award, and Addison agrees to leave her at home.

When Addison leaves, Eve heads upstairs to their beautiful apartment. While she stands before the mirror, we see a figure lying in a chair behind her. Eve then sees the figure of a woman in the mirror. Eve asks who the woman is. The girl apologizes for falling asleep. The woman had hidden when the maid came in, because she wanted to report on Eve. The girl is the president of one of Eve's fan clubs and begins to ask all sorts of questions. The girl cleans up the mess from the drink Eve had spilled in shock. The girl had come up from Brooklyn. When the bell rings, the girl answers the door. Addison is there, and he questions her. Addison hands the award over so that Eve will have it. Addison is surprised that the girl knew her, and she introduces herself as Phoebe. Phoebe reveals to him that she wants that type of award someday, and he suggests that she ask Eve how to get that type of award, because she knows all about it.

When Eve asks who was at the door, the girl tells her it was just the cabbie who was returning the award. On Eve's orders, she places the award on her trunks, and then stops to pick up one of Eve's coats and try it on for size. Like Eve, she imagines the day when she also will have such a luxurious coat and such an award. While she admires herself in the mirror, she even takes a bow.

# Characters

## Margo Channing, played by Bette Davis

### Description

Margo Channing is the most famous theater actress of her time. From her younger years until the present, she has been the envy of other actresses and woman around the world. Every man wants to win her and every young woman wants to be her. As the years have passed, Margo has allowed this interest in her to go to her head.

When Eve decides to wait on Margo hand and foot, Margo seems to expect it. Eve takes advantage of the fact that Margo is oblivious to her plan and uses the time to study Margo - her behavior, her style, and her attitude. Eve realizes that if she is like Margo, she can also make her way to being a star.

Margo finally realizes that Eve is intentionally sabotaging her life, and she wants to put a stop to it. However, Eve has made everyone feel sorry for her, and they all think Margo is in the wrong. After Karen and the others teach her a lesson, Margo breaks down when she reads Addison's review. Margo and Bill reunite, though, and she decides to focus on being a woman rather than being a star.

### Analysis

Margo is a petty, selfish woman when we first meet her. Margo is the best and most highly acclaimed actress on the stage, and she knows it. Margo treats everyone as though they were just tools for her happiness. When Eve finally starts not only taking care of Margo's plans, but also taking care of everyone else's life, the others begin to recognize Margo's selfishness.

Margo is angry with herself and everyone else for believing Eve's lies. Margo realizes, after the phone call to Bill, that Eve is purposely trying to manipulate the situation. Margo's selfishness, however, causes everyone else to doubt the truth of this accusation. No one wants to believe that Eve could be the problem, rather than Margo.

By the end of the film, Margo has changed dramatically. Margo has been torn down by Addison's review, and she has realized the futility of her life as it is. After getting back together with Bill, Margo decides that she has finally reached a point where she wants to settle down. Margo is a much quieter, more peaceful woman after the events than she ever was as a famous actress.

## **Eve Harrington, played by Anne Baxter**

### **Description**

Eve Harrington is a young, manipulative woman. Eve is from a poor family and ran away from home a couple of years earlier. When she came to New York, she had no friends, so she has to find a way to get into the theater. Eve's plan is to manipulate her way to the top, rather than to work.

Eve stands outside the theater each night, until Karen finally meets her and takes her up to Margo's dressing room. Eve then begins her process of manipulation by telling a sad story about a dead husband and her love for Margo's work. Eve works her way into their hearts, and she gets a spot helping Margo.

Eve finally makes her way to the top and secretly becomes Margo's understudy. When Karen comes up with the plan to save Margo from herself, Eve is more than happy to help. After calling all the critics in town, Eve gives a marvelous performance and causes Margo great sadness. Eventually, Eve also tries to steal Lloyd, but Addison puts a stop to her plans since he knows the truth of her past. Eve wins a prize for her work, but she has become a spoiled starlet just like Margo once was.

### **Analysis**

Eve is manipulative and cunning. Eve has an entire plan before she ever meets Margo, including a story that is sure to win the sympathy of everyone she meets. No one is able to see through Eve, because she is such a good actress; no one, except Addison DeWitt, that is. Since Addison is much like Eve, he realizes her lies, and he searches for the truth.

While Eve follows her plan, she subtly makes Margo's life difficult. Eve studies Margo, and then tries to steal away her friends and even her lover. Eve finally does manage to steal some of Margo's glory by giving a first-rate performance in Margo's part in the play.

Eve finally wins the role that she has coveted, and then tries to win Lloyd as well. Eve comes close, until Addison calls her bluff. Eve is then 'owned' by him and must do what he says or risk being revealed as a fake. Eve finally turns into a spoiled, pampered star, and we are able to see that she is now being fooled by the young Phoebe, who expects to gain fame in the same way Eve did.

## **Addison DeWitt, played by George Sanders**

### **Description**

Addison DeWitt is a cynical, calculating critic. Addison is also the narrator of most of the film. Addison introduces us to all the main characters and helps set up most of the

events in the film. Addison cares for no one but himself, although he does have respect for certain, kind people, such as Karen.

Addison is the first to recognize Eve's lies, and he digs around to find the truth. After discovering her true past and her current deception, he lets her know that he owns her. Addison stops Eve from breaking up Lloyd and Karen, because of his great respect for Karen. Addison and Eve are very much alike, but Addison is a gentleman in many ways, whereas Eve will never be a lady.

## **Analysis**

Although Addison is cruel and writes harsh things about Margo, he proves himself to be a good friend to Karen and Lloyd. Addison is a serious investigator and learns everything he needs to know to gain a hold over Eve. Addison then lets Eve know that he will be deciding what she does in the future and puts an end to many of her evil plans.

Addison cannot be described as a kind man, but he does have moral values and tries to stand up for what he believes. Addison respects Eve for what she's accomplished, but he will never have the same type of respect for her that he has for a good woman like Karen. Thus, he protects Karen from Eve's deceptions.

## **Karen Richards, played by Celeste Holm**

### **Description**

Karen is Margo's best friend and Lloyd's wife. Karen notices Eve when she enters the theater each night, and she finally decides to meet her. When Eve gushes about Margo, Karen offers to introduce her to Margo and the others.

Karen trusts Eve a little too much and does not realize how much she and the others are being manipulated. Karen decides to put Margo in her place by allowing the car to get stuck and have Eve open the new show. Eve then blackmails Margo for a spot in the next show, but everything works out, since Margo doesn't want the part anyway.

Karen almost loses her husband when Eve decides that she should have Lloyd all to herself. Karen fights for Lloyd but only wins him back when Addison puts a stop to Eve's plan. Karen and Lloyd reconcile, and Karen watches with annoyance while Eve receives the award after a long year of intense manipulation.

### **Analysis**

Karen is a kind, trusting woman. Karen believes the best about everyone, and she eventually gets into a lot of trouble, because she chooses to trust Eve. Karen has a kind heart and has difficulty believing anything bad about the young, seemingly defenseless Eve.



Karen does her best to help all of her friends. Karen tries to help Eve by introducing her to Margo and the others. Karen also tries to help Margo by bringing her down a notch. Despite her best intentions, Karen's plans seem to go awry and cause trouble for those she most loves.

## **Bill Sampson, played by Gary Merrill**

### **Description**

Bill Sampson is a brilliant director, both on the stage and in Hollywood. Bill and Margo have been dating for years, but she is still not ready to settle down. Although Bill is frustrated by her attitude, he does try to understand the importance of her career.

Even when Eve tries to steal Bill from Margo, he remains faithful to Margo. Bill comes running when he reads Addison's article in the paper blasting Margo and praising Eve. Bill finally realizes what Margo said about Eve was true, and he and Margo finally become engaged.

### **Analysis**

Bill is faithful and loyal to Margo through everything. When most men would have bailed out of the relationship because she was being so difficult, Bill stands by her. Although he does leave Margo for a while, he is mainly giving her time to see how life would be without him. Margo doesn't like it, and he is finally able to have the relationship with her that he has always wanted.

## **Lloyd Richards, played by Hugh Marlowe**

### **Description**

Lloyd Richards writes all the plays shown in the film. Lloyd and Karen have been friends with Bill and Margo for years. Lloyd loves his work and generally appreciates the way Margo presents his characters, though he does dislike the fact that she sometimes changes words to suit her.

Lloyd has always been a faithful husband to Karen, that is, until Eve comes along. Eve manipulates the situation and decides that she and Lloyd would be the perfect match. With his plays and her skills, they would be the most successful couple in the theater. Lloyd goes along with her for awhile, but after Addison steps in, Lloyd comes to his senses and returns to Karen.



## **Analysis**

Lloyd and Karen have a comfortable, friendly relationship. The two love each other very much, and Karen is completely supportive of Lloyd's career. Lloyd appreciates Karen and has never treated her badly until Eve comes along.

Lloyd is a brilliant writer who has worked with only the best in the industry for years. Lloyd's best friend, Bill, has helped him on all his projects, and until Eve came along, they always got along wonderfully. Eve comes between them, because Lloyd wants her to be immune from Bill's directing. While Eve works her way between them, she also begins to work her way into Lloyd's heart.

Lloyd falls for Eve, while she manipulates numerous situations to make sure that he comes over late at night or feels sympathy for her. Eve plans that they should marry, because, together, they could be the most successful couple in the industry. Lloyd falls hook, line, and sinker, but Addison saves Lloyd's marriage for Karen's sake.

## **Max Fabian, played by Gregory Ratoff**

### **Description**

Max Fabian is the producer of the plays that Lloyd writes and Bill directs. The trio often works together, and Margo generally stars in the shows.

### **Analysis**

Max is easy-going and everyone seems to get along with him. Max cares about the success of his plays, but he also trusts everyone involved.

## **Birdie Coonan, played by Thelma Ritter**

### **Description**

Birdie Coonan is Margo's old friend and maid. Birdie, unlike the others, has no fear of Margo and her tantrums. Birdie openly lets Margo know exactly what she thinks of her and her plans. When Margo begins to distrust Eve, she finally asks Birdie's opinion, even though Birdie has nonverbally shown her feelings for quite some time.

### **Analysis**

Birdie is one of the best friends Margo has, because she is willing to openly tell Margo the truth. Birdie is forthright, and her opinions are generally the ones that make the most sense. Even when no one else sees through Eve, Birdie does.

## **Miss Caswell, played by Marilyn Monroe**

### **Description**

Miss Caswell is a girl whom Addison has picked up. Because of his status as a critic, she is lucky to have him working on her side. Addison likes the adoration, and she likes the perks and connections.

### **Analysis**

Miss Caswell becomes sick when she tries to audition, and although she has Addison's favor, she doesn't seek to win over anyone else. Also important is that this is one of Marilyn Monroe's first roles.

## **Phoebe, played by Barbara Bates**

### **Description**

Phoebe is a young woman whom Eve finds sleeping in her chair in her apartment after the awards ceremony. The girl professes to be the head of a local Eve Harrington fan club, and she begins to wait on Eve hand and foot, just like Eve treated Margo when Eve first began her career.

### **Analysis**

Like Eve, Phoebe is willing to do anything to get to the top. Phoebe does the same things to Eve that Eve did to Margo, without Eve ever recognizing it. While in Eve's room, Phoebe holds Eve's dress up to herself and holds the award, while looking into the mirror and imagining what it would be like to win such an award, the same way Eve had done with Margo's dress before.



# Themes

## Drive for Success

*All About Eve* is all about the drive for success. Eve Harrington is willing to do absolutely anything to make her way quickly up the theatrical ladder. Eve uses a sweet, caring personality to make her way into the trust and lives of those she meets. Eve's acting skills are stunningly clear while she maneuvers her way into the perfect position to launch her career.

Eve's drive for success is a drive that has no interest in anyone else but herself and her success. Eve cares nothing for the people she hurts; instead, she believes that she is just making things happen that should have already happened. Addison discovers her secrets and lies, and begins 'owning' her with that knowledge, which keeps her from destroying yet more lives and careers.

## Broken Trust

After a trust is broken, there are few things that can repair it. Many of the relationships in *All About Eve* have been important to the characters for many years. For instance, the relationship between Karen and Margo goes back to their early days in the theater. All of these could easily have been destroyed by a few breaks in trust.

When Karen first comes up with her plan to bring Margo down a notch, she never suspects the terrible repercussions. After reading Addison's article, Karen cannot imagine letting Margo know about her terrible deception. Thus, Eve's blackmail attempt keeps Karen silent, so that she can hold together an important friendship.

We also see that when Eve breaks trust with everyone she has met, they all turn on her. Karen, Margo, Lloyd, and Bill want nothing to do with her anymore now that they know what a snake she is. Even Addison wants to control Eve more than he actually wants to befriend her. Eve's broken trusts leave behind a long line of burned bridges.

## Career versus Love

Balancing a career and love is difficult for anyone, but women often find it excruciating to find a balance. A woman's need for relationships, both romantic and platonic, make it difficult for her to sacrifice those relationships for a career.

Margo Channing tries to find a balance throughout the entire film. In the beginning, she loves Bill, but she is unable to truly admit that love, because of her fear that he will try to keep her from working. Margo has no desire to lose her independence or career, although Bill has no intention of asking her to make those sacrifices.

Finally, Margo admits that she loves Bill, and they decide to get married. Although she loves the theater, she finally realizes that she is missing out on life. Margo agrees to continue performing for a while, but eventually she wants to quit altogether, so that she can enjoy her new love and maybe someday a family of her own.

## Style and Cinematography

Let the theater come to life in all its glory and grit in *All About Eve*. When the movie begins, viewers are somewhat tricked into believing that this could be a happy story - the story of a young, innocent girl, who worked her way up in the theater. We quickly discover, however, that Eve is anything but innocent, and the only work she does is to trick other people into doing her will, in spite of their own best interests.

When we see into the life of the theater and its people, we watch the events through the series of shows in which the actors and actresses perform. We see Eve waiting outside one of Margo's shows, in awe of the famous actress; we see Addison giving his reports; we see the practices; we see Eve's desperate search for wealth and fame; and we watch while Eve finds a young woman, just like her, waiting to pull the same stunt.

The style reflects the style of the theater. Everything is beautiful, large, and dramatic, but we also see the gritty, real life side of the events. Most outsiders only watch when someone suddenly becomes famous, but we see the truth of the matter while we watch Eve's trek up the ladder.

# Motifs

## Shows

*All About Eve* is told through a series of Broadway shows. With each show, we learn something more about the characters, their motivations, and their attitudes. With the first show, we are introduced to all the characters. We learn that Eve is the simple girl who watches the show every night and is in awe of Margo. We learn that Margo is selfish and conceited but also very successful. We learn that Karen, Bill, and Lloyd are all a little more kindhearted than Margo, while Birdie is always honest.

During later shows, we watch while Eve tries to become more involved in Margo's world. One night after a show, Eve takes Margo's costume, and she stands outside and practices bowing while wearing it. We also see that Eve manipulates her way into becoming Margo's understudy, and then she performs in the first showing of the play.

Finally, we see Eve's performance in Lloyd's favorite and most prized work. While they practice, Lloyd and Bill fight over Eve's performance, and Karen stops coming to rehearsals, because Lloyd is so involved with and interested in Eve. Finally, we see that Eve has reached her goal. Eve has won a great award for her performance in Lloyd's play, but she has become a selfish brat in the process.

## Narration

Addison DeWitt narrates most of the film. Addison is a famous New York critic, whose opinion can help determine the fate of a play or a career. Addison introduces us to all the main players and describes each one vividly. As somewhat of an outsider, he is able to give a more objective view of the events and the main players.

Later, both Karen and Margo also narrate sections of the film. Karen gives her viewpoint, since she was the first person to meet Eve, and she was the one to bring Eve into their world. Karen also narrates sections where she and Eve meet alone, or when she and Margo talk.

The narration helps us see the events from several different points of view. Also, it helps split the film into sections. After each narration, we see some new part of Eve and learn more about the characters' feelings and relationships.

## Gatherings

The characters in the film participate in numerous gatherings. The first gathering we see is the award ceremony. There, Addison introduces us to all the key players in the film, and we see that Eve has become one of the most famous actresses in New York.

Whenever the characters get together, something new is bound to happen. At Margo's party one night, we learn that only she sees through Eve and the others are still clueless. Then, when Margo, Bill, Karen, and Lloyd have dinner one night, we discover that Bill and Margo are getting married, and Eve is blackmailing Karen.

# Symbols

## Eve's Award

When Eve finally receives the award at the ceremony, it symbolizes everything she has ever wanted. Eve has worked hard to manipulate people and situations so that she could be recognized as one of the greatest actresses in the theater.

Eve began her plan by studying the greatest actress on stage at the time, Margo Channing. By getting to know Margo's friend Karen, Eve makes her way into Margo's life and world. Eve helps Margo and does everything she asks, while at the same time learning Margo's way of doing things and subtly making her life more difficult.

Addison DeWitt eventually proves that the life Eve has presented has all been a façade, and he refuses to let her destroy some things. Now that he 'owns' her, she is, at least, only a threat to herself. Not only does Eve's award symbolize her success, but also it symbolizes her move from a helper to a spoiled actress, which she shows when she goes home instead of to the party after the ceremony.

Eve's award also symbolizes Phoebe's attempt to rise in a similar way. When the film ends, we see Phoebe dressed in Eve's coat and holding the award in front of the mirror, imagining what life would be like if she also won such an award.

## Dresses and Coats

Throughout the film, the dresses and coats that the characters wear helps to tell the viewer something about them. These are used to symbolize personalities and sometimes even motivations. Though many people might overlook the clothing, it is one of the most revealing aspects of the film.

In the beginning of the film, we learn the status of the characters by looking at their clothing. We first see everyone at the awards ceremony and realize that they are all dressed in fine clothes, so they must be wealthy. Then, we see Eve in the beginning, and realize that, unlike the others, she has not always had fine clothes. Eve's shabby clothes, which she wears in the street while it's raining, help us to see the comparison between her status and that of the other main characters.

Later, we are also able to learn about peoples' motivations through their dress. Eve holds Margo's costume up to her and begins taking bows early in the film, and we realize that Eve's goal is to become the next Margo. In the final scene, we see Phoebe take Eve's coat and do the same thing; the connection is clear - Phoebe will be to Eve what Eve was to Margo.

## Mirrors

Each time we see a mirror in this film, one of the characters is learning something more about themselves or someone else. A mirror in most films and books symbolizes the reflection of a person's spirit. A person's attitude and motivations are easily recognizable when they are reflected in a mirror.

We notice mirrors throughout the film. When we first meet Margo, she is adoring herself in a mirror and primping for a wonderful evening. After Eve begins to manipulate Margo's life, we again see Margo's face in the mirror, a face worn with care. In the final scene, we watch while Phoebe takes a bow in Eve's mirror while she holds Eve's award and wears Eve's clothes. Margo may be selfish, but both Eve and Phoebe are cruel and manipulative.

# Essay Questions

Who is the beginning narrator of the story and what is the occasion?

How does Eve meet Karen?

Why does Margo decide to help Eve?

Describe Eve's devotion to Margo.

When does Margo begin to become suspicious of Eve's intentions?

Why does Birdie not trust Eve?

What is Karen's plan to bring Margo down a notch?

Why does Margo decide not to appear in *Footsteps*?

Why does Addison 'own' Eve?

Who does Phoebe remind viewers of, and does Eve recognize this?