

# **Eden Close Study Guide**

## **Eden Close by Anita Shreve**

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## Plot Summary

Eden Close is the first novel by acclaimed romance author, Anita Shreve. In this novel, Andrew returns to his childhood home to bury his mother and prepare the house for sale. The more time Andrew spends in this home he has rarely visited in nineteen years, the more memories of his childhood flood his mind. Many of these memories center on Eden Close, his childhood friend and neighbor. Eden was blinded the summer Andrew left for college in a home invasion that resulted in the death of her father. However, the more Andrew remembers about this fateful night and the year leading up to it, the more he realizes the truth about that night has never been revealed. Eden Close is a story of one woman's tragic childhood and the man who has loved her all his life.

Andrew is attempting to sleep the night after his mother's funeral, but being in his childhood bedroom has brought back nightmares of a night he had though he had forgotten. The night was hot and humid, much like this one, when Andrew heard screams from the house next door. Andrew stood in the yard with his mother as they brought Eden, his friend, out of the house, her head wrapped in a bloodied towel. Andrew's father came out of the house a few minutes later and told them Jim Close, Eden's father, was dead. Someone had broken into the house and was raping Eden when Jim walked in on it. The intruder shot Jim and ran away, disappearing into the night.

Andrew recalls asking about Eden a few times on his rare visits home. However, Andrew's life moved in other directions. Andrew married, had a son, and is now separated. Asking about Eden in front of his wife had always seemed wrong, so eventually he stopped asking. Andrew believes, however, that Eden never left his thoughts. Over the next few days, as he works at fixing up the house for sale, Andrew begins to recall everything about Eden. Andrew remembers being in the garden behind his house when Edith came to his mother with a small bundle in her arms. It was an infant, abandoned by the road.

Andrew remembers how Jim Close was excited by the baby, determined to keep it despite his wife's apathy. Jim spoiled Eden, buying her anything she wanted and lavishing all his attention on her. At the same time, Edith, his wife, ignored the child until her cries were unavoidable. Edith and Eden never had a good relationship. Through the years, they could often be heard screaming at one another, fighting over some unforgivable act.

When Andrew was fourteen and Eden eleven, she began hanging out with him and his friends. Andrew recalls how his friends resented her at first, but came to accept her constant presence. It was three years of happiness as far as Andrew was concerned, afternoons playing hockey or swimming, and evenings eating ice cream in the yard. However, it all came to a crushing end the summer Eden turned thirteen. Eden got her first menstrual period and stopped coming around, preferring to spend her afternoons getting a tan.



When school began again, rumors circulated that Eden was promiscuous, willing to share her body with any boy asking. Eden began dating Sean that year too, one of Andrew's closest friends. Andrew was jealous, unsure why, and became angry whenever someone would speak openly about Eden's behavior. Then that night happened and Andrew went away, losing touch of Eden for good.

Andrew is back now, and these memories draw him to the house next door. Andrew begins visiting Eden, waiting until Edith goes to work and careful to leave before she returns. Andrew takes Eden to the old pond where they once played hockey and swam. They make love for the first time, fulfilling a fantasy Andrew has held onto for nineteen years. Andrew is frightened, however, aware of how vulnerable Eden is and the impact of what he has done and will do might affect her. Andrew thinks of leaving, but is unable to let Eden go.

Andrew continues to see Eden, lavishing her with gifts and indulging in constant expressions of affection. However, as time passes, Andrew becomes more aware of the outside world and his need to return to it. Andrew asks Eden to go with him, but she refuses. Andrew pushes her, finally getting her to admit to the sexual abuse her father perpetrated on her as a child. As they discuss the past, Edith walks in on them and attempts to shoot Eden with a shotgun. It is then that Andrew finally realizes what really happened the night Jim died. It was Edith's jealousy. Edith shot Jim and wounded Eden in an attempt to kill Eden for taking her husband's affections away. Edith is placed in a mental institute and Eden agrees to leave with Andrew, excited to begin a new life outside the barriers of her secrets.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Andrew is a businessman in charge of the advertising for a pharmaceutical company. Andrew is recently separated from his wife and has come home to bury his recently deceased mother. Andrew hopes to fix up his childhood home for sale, and to return to work within a week.

Andrew is attempting to sleep on a hot, humid night, but a vivid dream of a childhood memory wakes him. Andrew has recalled the night Eden Close, his neighbor, was attacked in her bed, raped, and her father murdered. The dream is so vivid, Andrew can recall the sound of Edith Close's screams and the feeling of being seventeen again. It is a dream he does not wish to end, but the heat is too overwhelming. Andrew sits up and looks out the window toward the Close house, recalling how he did this very thing that fateful night. The houses, although two miles outside of town, are less than seventy feet apart. Andrew recalls the horrible heat of that night and leaving the kitchen after dinner to find some relief in the yard. To this day, Andrew cannot recall if Edith's car was in the driveway at that point, waiting for Jim to pick her up from work and take her to see a movie as she would later claim. Andrew does recall, however, his reluctant participation in the family rituals and his eagerness to go off to college and get as far from there as possible.

Andrew goes downstairs and remembers the phone call his secretary took four days ago that let him know his mother had passed. Mrs. Close, as he had always thought of Edith, was the one to find her. A massive stroke before breakfast, she said. The funeral was that morning, but it is all still so surreal to Andrew that he has yet to take it in. Both his parents are gone now, his dad having passed a few years before. Now Andrew must face packing up his childhood home, forced to decide what to keep, what to sell, and what to throw away. Andrew sits in the kitchen and nurses a glass of brandy, thinking of the house he bought for his wife, the one she still lives in, with all its modern appliances and lack of character. Andrew was once proud of that house, but now this simpler place seems more like home.

Sitting in the kitchen, Andrew recalls again that night, his father grabbing a rifle and rushing out the door, calling to his family to stay where they were. Andrew dressed and joined his mother at the screen door, straining to see anything in the dark. They could not see a thing, so Andrew went into the yard, his mother close on his heels. The police quickly arrived and within minutes Eden was taken from the house on a stretcher, her head wrapped in a bloodied towel. Andrew and his mother wondered where Eden's mother might be, since she was only a fourteen year old girl. His mind back in the present, Andrew thinks of his mother, the funeral they had that day. Edith was there, the only one in black, saying goodbye to a neighbor who might have been a friend but was not. Back in the past, Andrew recalls his father coming out of the Close house, telling them Eden had been raped and Jim killed when he came upon the attack. Edith was



escorted out then, hysterical, the ambulance attendants and cops forced to hold her down.

Eden can hear Andrew moving around outside his house. Eden imagines him as he was when she last saw him, a thin, but strong young man, his hair growing long in preparation for his departure to college. Eden thinks of the last time they were alone together, when he would not touch her the way others already had. Eden knows Andrew's mother has died and his visit here is temporary. Eden also knows that Edith is anxious for him to be gone.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter introduces the main characters and the event that will act as a catalyst for the developing plot. The first person the reader is introduced to is Andrew, the narrator. Andrew is a businessman who has recently separated from his wife. Andrew has come to his childhood home to bury his mother. Andrew begins to recall the night his neighbor was raped and her father killed as he spends his first night alone in his boyhood bedroom. This memory is of a night that took place when Andrew was only seventeen, eagerly awaiting the day when he was to leave for college. Although Andrew loves his parents, he was like most teenagers who are eager to face the real world outside the familiar walls of the family home. Andrew has been successful in business, as represented by the BMW he drives, but unsuccessful in love.

Eden Close is Andrew's neighbor and one time friend. Eden is the victim who was raped the night Andrew begins to remember as he attempts to sleep in his boyhood bed. Eden is blind now, but she is aware that Andrew has come back. From the small, first person snippet at the end of the chapter, the reader can see that there was once some real affection for Andrew on Eden's part. It also suggests that Eden once tried to seduce Andrew but was rebuked because she was not a virgin. Finally, Eden's thoughts reveal that Edith, her mother, is unhappy with Andrew having returned to his childhood home and eagerly awaits his departure. This suggests some distrust or dislike on Edith's part toward Andrew, but the reader is unclear of the motive at this point.

The night Andrew recalls is a night when Jim, Eden's father, apparently came home from the movies and found Eden being raped by an unknown intruder. Jim attempted to protect his daughter and was shot in the process. Edith, his wife, walked in after the shooting and found her husband dead on the floor. Andrew's father then went into the house and found this scene. Andrew's father called the police. This episode appears to be fully explained through Andrew's memories, but the reader has only the testimony of Andrew's father to go on. This leaves some interpretation on the part of the reader, especially since Edith seems afraid of Andrew and his presence in his mother's house.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

A storm passes through town in the early morning hours. In the morning, after a restless night, Andrew makes himself a cup of coffee and piece of cake before getting to work on the that needs done before the house can be sold. Andrew has not done this type of work in years, having paid people to do it at his house in New Jersey, so he is almost excited to have the opportunity to do some physical labor. Andrew puts on a pair of bell bottoms he finds in his closet and begins scraping paint from the side of the house. An hour into the job, Andrew sees Edith come out of her house, ready to go to work. Andrew knows from his mother's letters that she works every day from ten to two. Andrew calls out a friendly greeting. As Edith responds in a cool manner, Andrew recalls how she looked as a younger woman and his mother's disapproval of Edith's open worship toward her husband, Jim. Jim was a charming man, who charmed even the child Andrew once was. Andrew recalls the sticks of gum Jim always had for him. Andrew recalls as well the projects Jim often started and never finished, leaving his father to do them in his absence.

As Andrew continues to work, he recalls the morning he was in the garden with his mother, no more than three or four, when Edith came over with a bundle in her arms. Edith had found an infant abandoned in a box out near the road by their privet hedge. Andrew's mother immediately took Edith inside and called the authorities. The doctor came and checked the baby out, declaring her perfectly healthy. Edith, although clearly baffled and unsure of herself, agreed to care for the child until other arrangements could be made. Andrew's mother called Jim where he was on the road with his sales job. Jim sounded excited, a fact that shocked Andrew's mother. Jim rushed home and held the baby with obvious delight. Despite Edith's clear dismay, Jim insisted that they would keep the baby and name her Eden. Andrew thinks of this day as the first intruder to enter Edith's life, the first to take Jim from her, his attentions at least.

Andrew hears a car pull into his driveway and discovers T.J., a childhood friend, standing in his yard. They go inside for beers and to catch up a little. It turns out T.J. is into real estate now and he offers to help Andrew sell his house. Andrew suspects this is the main reason T.J. has come to see him today. Andrew also learns that T.J. has married a girl they both went to high school with and has two children. T.J. invites Andrew to dinner at his house, but explains he has to talk to his wife before they make committed plans. As Andrew walks T.J. to his car, T.J. asks about Eden. Andrew says he has not seen her yet. T.J. tells him he has seen Eden on several occasions, but she was always sitting in a car, waiting on Edith.

Andrew returns to work before dining on a casserole left by the Ladies Guild who handled the reception after his mother's funeral. Andrew continues to think about Eden, of how Jim spoiled her with gifts and all his attention when he was home from his sales job. Andrew also recalls how Edith ignored the child, often forgetting to wash her and



once leaving her out in the yard while she took a nap. In front of Jim, Edith would shower the child with affection, but during his long absences, it would hardly matter to Edith if the child was there or not. Andrew recalls as that Eden was always peripheral to his life until the summer he was fourteen. That summer Eden asked to tag along as Andrew, T.J. and Sean went fishing at the pond across the field from Andrew's house. Sean and T.J. were unhappy having a girl join them, but Andrew could not see the harm. After that, it seemed Eden was always with them. Eden did not just tag along, either. Eden would participate in their games, sometimes showing more stoicism than the boys. Andrew can remember once when she was hit in the face with a hockey puck and she did not react at all except to flinch. It was also Eden who was the first to steal cigarettes and share them with the boys.

Andrew's friendship with Eden lasted three years. The summer Eden turned thirteen, however, things changed. They were at a baseball game, waiting their turn to bat, when Andrew noticed Eden's period had begun. Andrew helped her cover up the stains on her shorts, made an excuse for her, and walked her home. After that, Eden stopped hanging out with the guys. Instead, Andrew would see her tanning in the yard. That fall, when school began, Eden came out to catch the bus wearing revealing clothing. Eden ignored Andrew, acting as though they had never been friends.

Eden thinks Andrew knows some truth she does not reveal. Eden can hear Andrew working on his house. Sound is her only connection to the outside world, it is how she tells time. Edith cares for Eden, but only the necessities that cannot be ignored. Eden has heard T.J. talking to Andrew and she thinks he is full of lies. Eden recalls how T.J. was one of the boys who took advantage of her when she was young and guesses he never told Andrew that. Eden then thinks again of the last time she saw Andrew and how he told her she might have been his sister.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

The theme of jealousy is touched upon when Andrew begins to recall how Eden came to live with Edith and Jim Close. Eden was abandoned by her parents or some unknown person. Edith found her and cared enough to take her from the box she was in, but did not want the child. Edith is deeply in love with her husband and wants him all to herself. The idea of a child coming into that relationship fills Edith with jealousy. Edith does not wish to share Jim with anyone, even an innocent child. Therefore, Jim's excitement in taking on the baby baffles Edith. It also offers some confusion to the reader who does not understand why Jim would be so excited to take on an abandoned child when he could have one of his own or adopt a healthy child whose parents have signed a termination of rights release.

As Eden grows, Edith's apathy toward her becomes more and more evident. Edith clearly does not want the responsibility of this child and she makes it clear in her actions. However, Edith changes her tune when Jim is around, suggesting she is kind to the child simply to please her beloved husband. This is counterproductive and keeps Eden in her life, as well as confusing the poor child who does not understand why her





mother treats her as she does. All this combines to not only illustrate the theme of child parent relationships, but to show the reader the complicated childhood that has formed Eden's personality.

Eden becomes a tomboy, forging a strong friendship with Andrew for several years that begins to show the reader where the theme of unrequited love comes from. This relationship is very close, but Andrew sees it as a brother-sister relationship where Eden sees it as a boy-girl, love relationship. When Eden reaches maturity, she rejects everything she has been, including Andrew. This hurts Andrew in a way his childhood has not prepared him for. Eden is acting in a similar way as Edith, suggesting she knows no other way to deal with the changes that have come to her life. This behavior also foreshadows other changes in Eden's attitude in later chapters.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Andrew cleans up and goes over to speak with Edith. Edith is clearly reluctant to have him in her home. Andrew looks around the familiar kitchen, surprised to see little evidence of Jim having lived there. When he was alive, there were always Popular Mechanics magazines lying around. It was a joke in Andrew's house. Jim never had the skills to do anything described in the magazine's pages. Andrew and Edith talk about the grass, which Andrew offers to cut, and the rotted back steps, which Andrew offers to repair. Edith insists on paying Andrew and he finally accepts, tired of resisting her. Edith apologizes that she did not realize how bad Andrew's mother's health was in her final days, saying she should have seen the signs because she is a nurse. Andrew insists that she not torment herself. Andrew asks to see Eden, but Edith says she is sleeping. When Andrew insists, Edith continues to say Eden is asleep despite noises coming from her bedroom. Finally Andrew gives up and leaves.

As Andrew mows the lawn later that afternoon, he recalls how Eden's change in appearance was followed by rumors of her promiscuity. At the same time, arguments between Eden and Edith became loud and frequent. Andrew recalls once seeing Edith storm out of the kitchen following the sound of breaking glass. Andrew went to the door and peeked in, saw Eden at the table crying. Andrew walked away, however, unsure his interference was anything Eden would have wanted. It was shortly after that Andrew learned Eden and Sean, his friend, were dating exclusively. T.J. told him in the locker room and later Andrew saw them kissing. Andrew avoided Eden after that and was alone with her only once before the shooting. They walked to the pond together, Eden insisting despite Andrew's reluctance. Once there, Eden unbuttoned her shirt and told Andrew he could touch her, but Andrew refused. Andrew insisted they could have been brother and sister. Andrew then went to swim alone. They walked home in silence. Andrew tried to reach out to her as they reached their yards, but she stormed away. A week later, Andrew heard Eden had broken up with Sean. Sean did not take it well and would often park outside her house to try to speak to her whenever her parents went out. Sean would be arrested that July for drunk driving after wrecking his car on the road to Eden's house. Later, T.J. would tell Andrew that Sean cried when Eden continued to refuse to speak to him.

Andrew shuts off the mower and hears the phone ringing. It is T.J. inviting him to dinner on Friday. The phone rings again before Andrew can return to the yard. This time it is Jayne, Andrew's secretary, wondering when he will return to work. Andrew promises to return the following week. The phone rings a third time. Martha wants to know how Andrew is doing, and tells him she has taken their son to Nantucket to spend a few days with days with her parents. Andrew speaks to Billy for a few minutes, promising not to throw away a go-cart Andrew's father built when he was a child. This last phone call causes Andrew to reflect on how he met Martha at an antiwar rally and how deeply he had thought he loved her until he realized her passion was an anger of unknown origins



that would always possess his new bride. Andrew believes it is this anger that ultimately ended their marriage. This leads Andrew to think of Eden, wondering how often she was in his thoughts in the years of his marriage. Eden could haunt a man. This is clear in Sean's case. Sean died the day after the tragedy that left Eden. Sean was in an unfamiliar Manhattan neighborhood and was hit while he attempted to cross the street drunk.

The next morning, Andrew begins working on the gutters. It does not go well, so he quits early. Andrew drives into town to have lunch at the luncheonette. The luncheonette is no longer the same as the one Andrew remembers as a child. Andrew is joined at the counter by DeSalvo, the retired chief of police. They catch up a little, the conversation inevitably turning to the night of Jim Close's death. DeSalvo admits he never accepted the story Edith told, but he could never find anything to refute it. The murder weapon was never found, either. When DeSalvo describes how they found Eden's clothes neatly folded beside the bed with the book she had been reading, Andrew recognizes the title of the book as one he had been reading in preparation for college. Andrew rushes out of the luncheonette, suddenly determined to see Eden before Edith gets home. When he arrives at the house, Andrew finds Eden waiting for him in the kitchen. There is no time, so Andrew quickly leaves, but promises to return.

Eden hears Andrew's return, thinking that when she refuses to tell him about that night, he will leave. Eden thinks about the last time she saw him, of seeing him swim in the pond even as she hears him on the back steps. Eden hears him after he leaves, as well, watching her house even as Edith arrives home. Eden then thinks of what a brave man his father was, brave but stupid.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Edith refuses to allow Andrew to see Eden, setting up a situation where if he wants to see her, he will have to do it behind Edith's back. This suggests that Edith is hiding something, but the reader is not quite sure at this point what that might be. Eden waiting for Andrew when he comes into the house, however, suggests she is open to his visits despite Edith's warnings and her thoughts at the end of the chapter in which she suggests that she has a secret she will not share with Andrew. Eden is afraid Andrew will leave when she refuses to tell him this secret, but she lets him inside anyway. Eden's actions tell the reader she still cares for Andrew, but she has a secret that could change the way he sees her.

Andrew recalls the change in Eden's behavior and how she became promiscuous. Andrew also recalls a relationship between Eden and Sean that made him deeply jealous, causing him to rebuke Eden when she attempts to make a pass at him. Andrew does not like the idea of Eden sharing her body with Sean or anyone else and this leaves him feeling things he does not understand. When Eden comes on to him, it reveals to the reader that Eden cares about Andrew. It also reveals Andrew's confused feelings for Eden and explains why Andrew has been so focused on Eden since his return to his childhood home. There is a complicated relationship that has developed

between these two characters suggesting that it will continue, causing trouble with Edith.

Andrew runs into the retired police chief and learns that there are irregularities surrounding the night Jim Close died. This suggests to the reader that Edith's story of how her husband died is not completely true. At the same time, Eden makes the statement that Andrew's father was a brave but stupid man. This statement is confusing, but suggest that Andrew's father knew the truth about what happened that night and did something to help cover up the truth. All of this combines to create a mystery the reader expects will be solved by the end of the novel.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Andrew wakes the next morning to a normal breakfast after a trip to the supermarket. Andrew spends the morning sorting his mother's belongings, including her bureau drawers. In her underwear drawer Andrew finds the mementos that seem to describe his mother's life, including letters from his father and pictures of Andrew as a child, as well as pictures of his own son, Billy. Andrew sorts through his mother's things and thinks of all the things he did not know about her and the questions he would like to ask her now.

A little before two, Andrew goes to his kitchen door and waits for Edith to leave. Andrew is anxious to see Eden, but even after Edith has left, he finds himself hesitating. Finally Andrew goes to her and finds her once more waiting in the kitchen. They talk, but the conversation is tense and almost angry. Andrew helps Eden touch his face, to show her how he looks now, and then he does the same with her face. Andrew asks if he can get anything for Eden. Eden asks him not to bring her anything because Edith would know they were together. Noticing how messy and unkempt her hair is, Andrew asks Eden to get some shampoo and a brush. Andrew gently washes her hair and then brushes it out. Afterward, Andrew takes Eden outside to allow her hair to dry in the sun. A few minutes later, Eden insists on going inside and tells Andrew to leave so Edith will not find him there. Andrew promises to return the next day.

Later that day, Andrew goes to see Mr. O'Brien, Sean's dad, at his T.V. repair shop. Andrew does not know why he has gone, except that he wants to know if Sean was the intruder who raped Eden that night. Andrew is not prepared for how angry Mr. O'Brien still is about the death of his son. Mr. O'Brien accuses Eden of being responsible for the fact that the entire town has believed for nearly twenty years that his son is a rapist and a murderer. Andrew attempts to defend Eden, but quickly discovers it is a losing cause.

The next day, Andrew works in the herb garden. Edith comes over and asks him to stay away from Eden. Edith claims that Eden spent a great deal of time in a mental hospital after the death of her father and any reminders of the past could cause her to have a nervous breakdown. Edith insists that her concern is for Eden and that Andrew will only hurt her if he gives her hope and then disappears from her life forever. Andrew suggests she is overreacting, but Edith swears her only concern is for Eden. The conversation ends when DeSalvo arrives to return Andrew's checkbook.

After Edith goes to work, Andrew hesitates before going to see Eden. When he arrives, Andrew finds Eden anxiously waiting for him. They discuss his conversation with Edith briefly before Andrew suggests they go for a walk. Eden protests, afraid of going outside and of being caught by Edith. Andrew leads her to the path that goes to the pond, but Eden continues to protest. Eventually Andrew becomes aware that Eden does not have shoes on. Andrew finally relents and returns Eden to her home. That afternoon, Andrew



drives to the mall. On the way, Andrew hears a report about a thirteen year old girl who was raped and murdered, her body left in a barn. The report reminds Andrew of the night Eden was attacked. At the mall, Andrew searches for an appropriate pair of tennis shoes for Eden. After finally finding some, Andrew buys some sunglasses, concerned about Eden's lack of instinct to close her eyes in sunlight. Then Andrew realizes that it has gotten late and he needs to rush to make it to T.J.'s for dinner.

T.J.'s house is more of a showroom than a home, with all but one room too fancy to spend time in. Before dinner, Andrew asks T.J. if he ever had any type of sexual relationship with Eden. T.J. admits he did. T.J. goes on to say that Eden was giving it away to everyone in those days and the only one who did not take advantage of it was Andrew. They have dinner on T.V. trays in the family room. Afterward, Andrew begins to feel claustrophobic when T.J.'s wife suggests that Eden is somehow deformed from the shooting. Andrew steps out on the back deck where T.J. follows to apologize about his wife's remarks. Andrew brushes the apology off and leaves.

Andrew has trouble sleeping. A little before dawn, Andrew hears the farmer across the road driving a tractor through his fields. Andrew goes over to say hello. The farmer remarks on the news regarding the thirteen year old the day before and compares it to what happened to Eden. The farmer says the police tore up his fields looking for the murder weapon, but never found it.

When Andrew visits Eden that afternoon, she is once again waiting for him in the kitchen. Andrew puts the shoes on her feet and the sunglasses on her face before leading her outside. Eden again protests, but when she sees that Andrew is determined, she relents. Eden guides herself through the cornfield, using the stalks as a guide. When they reach the pond, Andrew leads her to a large shade tree. Eden insists that Andrew not worry about her and go for a swim. Andrew swims several laps before he becomes aware that Eden has joined him in the water. At first Andrew worries she will drown, but after a few minutes he can see that she somehow senses the edge and depth of the water. After they get out of the water, Andrew finds himself drawn to her. Andrew knows if he makes love to her there will be no turning back, but he cannot help himself. Afterward Eden naps. Andrew has to wake her so they can get back to the house before Edith returns.

At the house, Eden tells Andrew that Jim Close was her real father. Eden says that Edith told her when she was thirteen, and that her mother was a sixteen-year-old girl Jim had an affair with. Eden then pushes Andrew out of the house. At home, Andrew washes her dress. As he waits for it to finish, Andrew thinks about the Jim he once knew and how this new information changes everything he thought he knew about the charming man. Andrew begins to panic and think it would be better to leave, to remove himself from Eden and all the drama around her. Andrew goes as far as packing his car to leave when he realizes he cannot leave.

Eden hears Andrew pack his car and prepare to leave. Eden is not surprised; in fact she has expected this. In Andrew, Eden believes she can find freedom. However, Eden is



afraid to hope; sure he will eventually leave her. There is still a secret she cannot share because its revelation will almost guarantee his departure.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Andrew begins to pack up his mother's house and discovers keepsakes that tell him how his mother saw herself, the things that were important to her. Andrew knows he was important to his mother based on things regarding him and his son that kept, making him wish he had taken more time to be with her over the past twenty years. Andrew's revelations regarding his mother touch on the theme of relationships between parents and children, as well as showing the reader how deeply Andrew cared about his parents despite his desire to be a successful father, husband, and businessman outside of his parents' life.

Andrew begins spending time with Eden even though Edith has asked him to stay away. Edith claims that she does not want Andrew to spend time with Eden because she is afraid of what it will do to Eden when Andrew leaves. The reader is suspicious of Edith's motives, however, at the same time Andrew insists that Edith is overreacting. However, Andrew sees some truth in what Edith is saying, telling himself that he does plan to leave and that there is no room in his life for a blind, dependent woman. Andrew makes the choice to continue seeing Eden, however, showing the reader how deep his feelings for her run and how determined he is to learn the truth about the night Eden was blinded.

Andrew and Eden go to the pond after Andrew buys her new shoes and sunglasses, playing a care-taking role in her life. They make love, stepping over a line that Andrew knows he should not cross. Andrew then learns that Jim was really Eden's father, not just her adoptive father. Edith told Eden that Jim is her father and her mother is a sixteen-year-old girl Jim had an affair with. The age of this young woman suggests to the reader that Jim had a passion for young women, perhaps hinting at a motive for Eden's change in behavior when she turned thirteen, behavior that led to every boy in town sleeping with her except Andrew, according to T.J.

Andrew panics after making love to Eden because now he knows there is no walking away. However, Eden is an emotionally disturbed young woman who is living with an overprotective adoptive mother. The situation seems overwhelming to Andrew, especially since he is beginning to put the pieces of Eden's past together, even though he has not completely admitted this to himself. However, Andrew's love for Eden goes so deep that he is unable to walk away.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Eden and Andrew have been going to the pond every day for six days. Andrew brings Eden gifts almost every day, but most of them she refuses to keep out of fear Edith will find them and put an end to their visits. At a local library, Andrew has borrowed books in Braille for Eden to read, allowing her to spend the afternoons reading them and then taking them back to his house. Andrew also brings her picnic lunches, sharing them with her under the shade of the tree. One afternoon, Andrew falls asleep while Eden is swimming. Andrew panics, convinced she has drowned, and this overreaction causes Eden to insist she can care for herself. That is the same afternoon Andrew gives Eden a small tape recorder on which she can listen to books on tape. Andrew insists she keep this gift, telling her there is no way Edith will find it. In return, Eden tells Andrew how she felt in the days after the shooting. Andrew asks if Sean was the intruder, but Eden insists she does not remember the actual events.

Late one afternoon, Andrew gets a call from his boss. They want Andrew to return to work now. Andrew begs for more time, but his boss threatens to fire him if he does not return within the next few days. Martha calls soon after. Martha is also concerned about Andrew and angry that he failed to come pick up Billy as promised. It is the first time he has let Billy down. A third call comes from T.J. wondering when Andrew is going to meet with him to put the house on the market. T.J. drops the announcement that Edith Close is also selling her house.

Andrew has trouble sleeping that night, unsettled by the decisions he must make about his future. Andrew goes for a walk and is caught in a thunderstorm. Andrew comes across a dog that has been hit by a car. Andrew lies with the dog on the side of the road as the storm intensifies. The dog dies as they lie there. A farmer comes along and gives Andrew a ride back to his house. Andrew spends the rest of the morning burying the dog.

When Andrew visits Eden that morning he learns Edith found the tape recorder. Andrew asks Eden to leave with him that very day, but she refuses. Eden insists that Andrew knows nothing about her and cannot complicate his life by bringing her into it. Andrew insists he will not leave without her. Eden suggests they go upstairs to her bedroom. Andrew begins to seduce her while attempting to learn who she might have brought to this room before. Eden becomes frightened by his persistence. Andrew keeps pushing until finally Eden announces that it was Jim, that Jim was her lover.

Andrew pulls away and sits in a desk chair, idly searching through Eden's drawers. Andrew finds clay figurines Eden has made, beautiful figurines with minute detail. Slowly Eden tells him how Jim was always in her bed in some fashion and that they had become lovers when Edith began to work nights. Andrew asks if Edith knew and her reaction tells him she did. Andrew insists that she will come away with him now. Andrew





goes to Eden and they begin to make love. Suddenly Eden stops, pushing him away. The door bursts open and Edith comes inside with a shotgun. Andrew moves to defend himself, but quickly realizes that he is not her target.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Andrew and Eden have begun a relationship, seeing each other every day for the few hours that Edith is away. Finally Andrew insists that Eden go away with him when his personal life begins to intrude on him. Eden refuses, again hiding behind the secret that she is afraid will chase Andrew away if he learns what it is. Neither the reader nor Andrew are really surprised to learn that Jim was sexually abusing Eden, touching on the theme of sexual abuse. Eden's promiscuous behavior as a young girl is typical of the behavior of a child in her situation.

Andrew has hesitated about leaving his mother's house, about selling the house, has avoided returning to work, and has avoided seeing his child. All of this is Andrew's reality and Eden is his fantasy world. The two have always been separate, but now Andrew has decided to bring them together. However, Edith bursts into the room and threatens to end it all. Andrew realizes almost immediately that he is not her target, suggesting to the reader that Edith is not upset at Andrew for compromising her blind daughter, but at Eden. The motive is unclear at this point, but the next chapter is sure to reveal all.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Andrew and T.J. are fixing up Edith's house. Edith has been taken away to a mental facility to be evaluated should there ever be a trial. The night Edith burst into Eden's room, Andrew realized immediately she intended to kill Eden. Andrew disarmed her and she simply sat down, defeated. Andrew put it all together then, realizing that Edith must have come home early and found Jim with Eden. Edith attempted to kill Eden, but Jim somehow got in the way. When DeSalvo and the police arrive, Eden is able to support this story.

Several weeks have passed. Eden is now living with Andrew in his mother's house. After they finish fixing up Edith's house, they plan to go to the city where Andrew will enroll Eden in a school for the blind. Andrew intends to go back to work, but thinks it will be on more of a consultant capacity than full time. For Eden, Andrew hopes to help her continue working with her art, perhaps finding a better way to keep the clay from crumbling. Andrew has also learned that Martha plans to remarry. It seems they have all decided to get on with their lives. On Andrew's part, Eden is pregnant.

T.J. tells Andrew that his business is going under and he expects his wife will leave him when she finds out. This seems to explain the lies Eden heard in his voice. At home, Andrew asks Eden what happened to the gun the night Jim was killed. Eden reluctantly tells him that his own father hid it in a box he built in Edith's master bedroom closet. The next day, Andrew's father took the gun to his garage where it stayed until he died. Soon after his death, Andrew's mother gave it back to Edith, reluctant to be a part of the secrets of that night.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Now both the reader and Andrew know what happened that night. True to her jealous nature, a theme of the novel, Edith killed Jim in an attempt to kill Eden for being his lover. Instead of being outraged that her husband would commit such an ugly crime against their daughter, Edith is more focused on her jealousy that Eden would dare make love to her husband. It is an ugly situation made only uglier by Edith's unhealthy devotion to her husband.

Andrew has finally made decisions about his future, making Eden a major part of it. Eden is pregnant, therefore Andrew plans to bring her home with him, help her deal with her blindness, and help her set up an art career with her clay figurines. It seems Eden and Andrew have found their happily ever after. However, this ending is marred slightly for Andrew when he learns that in all the things he did not know about Eden's parents, he also missed some truths about his own parents. Andrew's father protected Edith, perhaps in a misunderstanding of the scene he walked in on that night. Andrew's mother

seemed to have realized the truth, however, because she refused to keep the gun that Andrew's father took to protect Edith. It seems no one ever truly knows anyone else and this is a lesson that is hard learned for Andrew.



# Characters

## Andrew

Andrew is a successful businessman who left home at seventeen and never again came back as a permanent resident. Andrew attended college, got married, had a child, and is now separated from his wife. Andrew continues to work at his lucrative job, overseeing the advertising department of a large pharmaceutical company. Andrew believes himself happy in his job until he learns that his mother has passed away. Andrew returns home to bury his mother and to prepare his childhood home for sale. However, as Andrew lives in and fixes up the house, he begins to remember his childhood, especially his friendship with the young girl who lives next door. These memories cause Andrew to become nostalgic and prolong his visit.

Andrew is at a point in his life where he seems to be at a crossroads and he does not know where to go next. Andrew is still mourning the death of his marriage and the changes this has brought to his relationship with his small son. Andrew wants to be a good father, but he is unsure how to do that without living in the home. To add to his worries, Andrew learns that his wife is planning to marry again. This means a new man in his son's life, someone else to take on the role of father that Andrew has vacated. Now Andrew must find a way to remain a father to his child without adding tension to an already complicated situation.

On top of his personal dilemma, Andrew finds himself drawn to Eden, his childhood friend and neighbor. Eden was blinded during a break in, during which Eden was raped and her father killed. Andrew remembers the night it all happened vividly because he and his parents were drawn to the commotion by the sound of Edith's, Eden's adoptive mother, cries. It was a traumatic night in which Andrew was unceremoniously introduced to the tragedies of adulthood and the final tie between him and his close friend was broken. Now Andrew finds himself filled with guilt of an unknown origin and drawn to Eden. Andrew begins spending time with Eden, only to learn the truth is much darker than the lies.

## Eden Close

Eden was discarded on the side of the road like a box of trash as an infant. Edith Close found Eden in a box beside her front drive, a crying infant who had been abandoned by some unknown person. Edith was stunned by this discovery and only willing to take care of the child long enough for the state to step in. However, Edith's husband was thrilled by the discovery of the child and insisted they adopt her. Jim even gave the child a name that was so similar to Edith's that the two were often confused about who it was he was calling.



Eden grows up spoiled by her father and ignored by her mother. As a small child, Eden has gifts lavished on her by her father, but finds herself often neglected by her uncaring mother. As she grows, Eden befriends the boy next door and becomes something of a tomboy, following him around and participating in any sport he seems to show interest in. For three summers, Eden and Andrew are inseparable, constantly together either playing games with his friends or eating ice cream in the yard. The summer Eden turns thirteen, however, things change. Eden is no longer interested in the boys, preferring to lie in the sun. When school begins, Eden starts wearing provocative clothing and flirting with all the boys. Eden even begins dating one boy exclusively, as rumors begin to spread about her promiscuity. The following summer Eden is blinded and her father killed, ending the innocence of her childhood.

Eden spends time in a mental hospital after her father's death, eventually returning to the home she now shares with her mother. Eden is cared for by her mother, but this care is minimal and only sees to her basic necessities. Eden spends most of her days sitting in her dark bedroom, molding clay in amazing figures with more detail than a sighted artist might provide. When Andrew returns, Eden is excited by the idea of reunited with the only boy she ever truly loved, but frightened that the truth about her past will change his opinion of her and make him leave again. Eden resists Andrew, but eventually she is forced to reveal the truth. To her surprise, Andrew knows her past is not her fault and continues to love her with the purity of heart she has never known.

## Edith Close

Edith is married to Jim and lives next door to Andrew and his family. Edith is a quiet, strong woman who keeps to herself most of the time. Edith works as a nurse, caring for the elderly. Jim is the only person in the world who matters to Edith. Edith would do almost anything for Jim and overlook anything to keep him. When Edith learns that she cannot have children, she is not saddened by this news because she does not want to share Jim with anyone. Therefore, when Eden comes along, Edith is shocked and hurt when Jim insists they adopt her as their own.

Edith treats Eden poorly, seeing the young child as nothing more than competition for Jim's love. All through Eden's childhood, Edith provides the minimum of care, often ignoring her child until the cries can no longer be tuned out. As Eden grows, their relationship deteriorates until they fight almost constantly. One day Edith tells Eden that Jim is her biological father to hurt the girl and make her feel unwanted.

One night, after work, Edith comes home to find Jim leaving Eden's room. Edith realizes that Jim has been having a sexual relationship with Eden and becomes enraged. However, rather than call the police or hurt Jim in some way, Edith takes a gun and attempts to kill Eden. Jim jumps in the way and takes the worst of the shotgun blast, dying there on Eden's floor. Eden is left blind. Edith takes Eden in after the shooting, for reasons unknown to the reader except perhaps because Eden is a part of her beloved Jim. They live in relative peace for nineteen years. When Andrew intrudes on their lives, however, it brings back all those old jealousies and Edith against tries to kill Eden when



she finds her in bed with Andrew. Edith is finally taken away, placed in a mental institution until her state of mind can be evaluated for a possible trial.

## Jim Close

Jim Close is Edith's husband. Jim is a salesman, a charming man who can charm a woman into doing almost anything he asks. Jim is also a lazy man who often begins projects, but rarely finishes them. Jim often has to ask his neighbor to come over and complete the projects he has begun, but does not have the stamina or knowledge to complete. Edith and Jim have a good relationship, but it appears that Jim has an eye for the ladies and is often involved in extramarital affairs that Edith chooses to overlook.

Jim wants to have a child. When his sixteen-year-old lover abandons her newborn baby on Jim's lawn, he jumps at the chance to be a father. Jim ignores the fact that his wife is deeply jealous and resentful of this new child. Jim lavishes his affections on Eden, spoiling her with every wish a child could conceive of. Jim will often lie in bed with his daughter at night, has always been there in one capacity or another. To Eden, although it was unnatural and disturbing, it seemed almost normal for their relationship to include sexual relations. However, Jim underestimated his wife's jealousy and never expected her to take a shotgun to Eden. Jim is killed when Edith attempts to shoot Eden and he gets in the way.

## Mom and Dad

Andrew's mom and dad were older when Andrew, their only child, was conceived. They are quiet people who work hard and expect only to be left alone. Andrew's dad works at the local dairy, driving a truck for most of his career before receiving a promotion to plant foreman. On the night Jim Close dies, Andrew's father instructs his family to stay inside while he goes to see what is happening. Andrew learns later that his father walked in on Edith in the moments after she shot Jim. Andrew's father misunderstands the situation and believes Edith has shot Jim for abusing Eden. For this reason, Andrew's father chooses to protect Edith by hiding the shotgun in a box he built inside her bedroom closet. Later, Andrew's father took the shotgun and hid it in his own garage.

Andrew's father lived a good life and died peacefully several years before the opening of the novel. Upon his death, Andrew's mother returned the shotgun to Edith, no longer willing to play a role in that terrible night's events. When Andrew learns this, he wonders if perhaps his mother had not figured out the real truth of that night. As the novel opens, Andrew learns that his mother has suffered a massive stroke and died in her bed. Andrew comes home to bury her and pack up his childhood home. As Andrew packs, he discovers things about his mother that he consciously never knew. Andrew sees his parents through the eyes of an adult for the first time and is saddened by opportunities missed.



## Tom Jackson or T.J.

Tom Jackson, or T.J., is a friend of Andrew's from his childhood. As kids, T.J. was the son of a social climbing woman who had little time for her child. T.J. spent a great deal of time at Andrew's, often playing baseball or hockey. When Andrew comes home to bury his mother, T.J. comes by to offer his condolences. It turns out that T.J. is in real estate and he quickly offers to help Andrew sell the house. Andrew is left with the feeling that selling the house is the only reason T.J. came to see him. When Andrew goes to T.J.'s for dinner, he discovers just how shallow his friend has become and how important material things have become. T.J. has grown up to be just like his mother. In the end, however, Andrew is to learn that T.J. is the same inside, he has simply allowed himself to fall into the same traps other adults fall into. T.J. is struggling with his work and is afraid his wife is only interested in the things money can buy.

## Sean O'Brien

Sean O'Brien is a childhood friend of Andrew's. Sean spends a lot of time at Andrew's house as a child, often playing baseball and hockey. When Eden wants to join their play, Sean is the only one to object, unwilling to let a girl in on their games. However, when Eden is thirteen and loses her tomboy ways and becomes more interested in fashion and dating, Sean becomes her first steady boyfriend. Sean is so deeply in love with Eden that he is crushed when she ends the relationship a short time before the fateful night in which Eden's father is killed. The police begin looking for Sean the morning after the shooting because they are aware that Sean has been stalking Eden and they think that he may be the person who broke into the house, raped Eden, and shot Jim. Sean leaves town the moment he learns of the shooting at Eden's and is hit by a car in Manhattan while crossing the street drunk.

## DeSalvo

DeSalvo was the police chief on the night Jim Close is killed. Andrew runs into DeSalvo while having lunch in town and they find themselves talking about that night. DeSalvo tells Andrew that he has always believed there was something strange about the attack on Eden and the subsequent shooting, but he could never prove it. There was never a gun found despite the extensive search they conducted that morning. Later, when Edith attempts to shoot Eden after finding her with Andrew, DeSalvo is the person Andrew directs Eden to call. DeSalvo comes and is very interested to hear Eden's story about the real events of that fateful night.

## Dr. Ryder

Dr. Ryder is the local doctor in the small town where Andrew grew up. Dr. Ryder was called to the farmhouses when Edith found Eden in a box and declares her perfectly healthy. Later it is Dr. Ryder who declares Jim Close dead after he is shot in his home.



during a home invasion. Dr. Ryder is a minor character who connects these two invasions into Edith Close's life. Dr. Ryder is still alive when Andrew's mother passes away, the same doctor who assures Andrew that his mother did not suffer when her stroke occurred.

## **Martha and Billy**

Martha is Andrew's wife. They met during a war rally. Andrew was impressed with Martha's passion regarding the war debate. Later, after they were married, Andrew came to discover that Martha is a person who is filled with anger all the time. There does not appear to be any real source for the anger, just an anger that spills into everything she does. After time, this anger becomes focused on Andrew and he believes this is what has ruined their marriage.

Billy is Andrew's son. Billy is only seven and does not truly understand why his parents cannot be married anymore. Andrew adores his son and wants to be a part of his life, but in light of the events that are taking place in his own life and the fact that Martha is getting remarried, Andrew finds it difficult to be a father to his son. Billy is a priority to Andrew, however, and he is determined to remain a large part of his life.





## Objects/Places

### Shotgun

Edith Close uses a shotgun to kill her husband, Jim. However, Edith's target was her daughter, Eden.

### Rifle

Andrew's father carried a rifle to the Close home on the night of the shooting, expecting to find an intruder in the house.

### Oxydol Box

When Edith found the infant Jim would later name Eden, she was in an Oxydol box.

### Tennis Shoes

Andrew buys Eden a pair of tennis shoes so that he can take her on walks, specifically to the pond.

### Sunglasses

Andrew buys Eden a pair of sunglasses because her blindness prevents her from instinctively closing her eyes to the sun's bright rays.

### Hairbrush and Shampoo

Andrew washes and brushes Eden's hair with her own hairbrush and shampoo because it appears to have gone unwashed for a long period of time, suggesting that Edith is not caring for her blind daughter as well as she should.

### Clay Figures

Eden uses clay to create figures. Edith provides the clay, but does not help Eden preserve them, such as drying them in a kiln, therefore many of the figures crumble and break.



## **Tape Recorder**

Andrew buys Eden a tape recorder so that she can listen to books on tape. Edith finds this tape recorder and throws it away before forbidding Eden from seeing Andrew again.

## **Gifts**

Andrew buys Eden multiple gifts during their time together, but Eden refuses to keep them out of fear that Edith will find them and prevent Eden from seeing Andrew any more.

## **Box in Closet**

Andrew's father built a box in the closet of the Close's master bedroom for Edith to keep her shotgun. After the shooting, Andrew's father hid the shotgun in this box to keep the police from finding it. Andrew's father then took the shotgun away and kept it in his garage until his death. Andrew's mother returned it to Edith who then removed it from this box to attempt to kill Eden a second time.

## **Underwear Drawer of Andrew's Mother**

When Andrew comes home to bury his mother, he finds her keepsakes in her underwear drawer, the things he felt spoke of the things that defined her life. Among these keepsakes were letters from Andrew's father, a fancy nightgown, and school awards Andrew had received.

## **Underwear Drawer of Edith Close**

After Edith is arrested, Andrew cleans out her house. In her underwear drawer, where he finds the things he believes define Edith's life, Andrew finds a fancy nightgown and postcards from Jim. There is nothing of Eden in this drawer.

## **BMW**

Andrew drives a fancy BMW. Andrew is embarrassed of this car when he comes home and is among humble, working class people.

## **The Pond**

Andrew and his friends spent a large part of their childhood at a pond near Andrew's house, both swimming and ice skating. When Andrew returns for his mother's funeral he takes Eden here. It is here where they first make love.



## **O'Brien TV Repair Shop**

The father of Andrew's childhood friend, Sean, owns a TV repair shop. Andrew stops by there to see Mr. O'Brien, but finds a bitter alcoholic who never got over the death of his son.

## **T.J.'s House**

T.J. lives in a fancy subdivision that was built on an old alfalfa farm. The house is decorated in black, white, and with many mirrors. Andrew feels the house is more of a showroom than a home.

## **Farmhouses**

There are two farmhouses two miles outside of town which were once the homes of two brothers who shared a farm. These farmhouses are less than seventy feet from one another. Andrew and his family live in one farmhouse and the Close family lives in the other.



# Themes

## Childhood Sexual Abuse

As a fourteen year old girl, Eden Close became promiscuous. Before this time, Eden is a tomboy, chasing the neighborhood boys around and joining in their sports. The day Eden gets her first menstrual period, however, changes her behavior. Suddenly Eden no longer wants to spend time with the boys. Eden becomes interested in fashion, often wearing revealing clothing and taking special care with her hair and makeup. Eden begins to date and rumors spread that Eden is willing to go all the way with any boy who asks. Through all this, however, Eden appears to moon over the one boy who is unwilling to take advantage of her promiscuous behavior.

A year after Eden's behavior changes so drastically, her father is killed and she is blinded by a shotgun blast. Nineteen years pass before Andrew, her childhood neighbor and best friend, returns home to bury his mother. Andrew begins visiting Eden, haunted by memories of their childhood together. As they get to know one another again, Andrew begins to realize that the story of her rape and her father's death that long ago night when she was blinded is not living up to the evidence. Andrew pushes Eden to tell him the truth, but she refuses. Andrew pushes their relationship, insisting that he and Eden could be together. Finally Eden tells him that she is not the person he believes her to be.

Eden has been hiding a dark secret since she was a small child. Eden was abandoned by her biological parents and adopted by the Closes. However, Eden learned as a teen that Jim Close is her biological father despite the way she came to live in their home. This truth is not the happy news it might have been to any other child because Jim Close has been having sexual relations with Eden. It is Jim's attentions to Eden that caused the radical change in her behavior and kept her from committing herself to Andrew. This abuse is also the cause of Jim's death and her own blindness. Edith came in on the two of them together one night and attempted to kill Eden out of jealousy. Jim jumped in the way, doing the only noble thing he had ever done in his life.

## Relationship Between Child and Parent

Andrew was a typical child of rural parents. Andrew could not wait to leave the family home and to begin a life in the exciting social atmosphere of the big city. Andrew rarely came home to visit, though he kept in touch as best as he could. Andrew's parents understood, accepting their son's desire to have his own life. Now, however, Andrew has returned home to discover that he drifted so far from his parents that he lost out on the little moments that are so precious between parent and child. Andrew mourns not only his mother's death, but the simplicity of their life and all the moments lost.



Next door, Eden Close lives in her dark world with only her adoptive mother, Edith, for company. Edith has done what appears to be an unselfish thing by taking her dependent daughter in. However, their relationship is not all it appears to be. Andrew remembers watching Edith and Eden interact when he and Eden were children. Edith always seemed indifferent to her child, never concerned about her health or emotional needs. Eden was spoiled, but it was her father to cater to her every need, often buying her expensive gifts and showering her with overwhelming attention. Eden adored her father and tolerated her mother, often fighting with Edith when Jim was not around.

On the night Jim died, Eden was blinded. It is said that an intruder broke into the house and was caught in the act of raping Eden. In truth, it turns out that Eden was being sexually abused by Jim and he was killed by Edith in a jealous rage. Eden, who seemed to have the perfect relationship with her father, was actually hiding the darkest secret a child could possibly suffer. Relationships between children and parents are complicated, often secretive, and it is this struggle that makes it a theme of this novel.

## Unrequited Love

Eden falls in love with Andrew as a thirteen year old girl, often eager to join in his sports and show him she is as good as any boy. They spend hours together, either playing or just hanging out, sharing their secrets and funny stories. It is a friendship that Andrew sees as platonic, but Eden dreams of blossoming into a storybook romance. When Eden begins to suffer the sexual abuse perpetrated by her father, she cuts off her relationship with Andrew out of shame. Eden becomes promiscuous, spending time with every boy in town except Andrew. This is Eden's way of dealing with the abuse and finding the affection she should receive from her father without shame and inappropriate behavior.

Andrew is deeply jealous whenever he sees Eden with her boyfriends or hears stories about her behavior. Andrew pulls away from Eden, emotionally distancing himself from her. After Eden is blinded, Andrew goes away to college and begins a life far away from their small town. Andrew thinks of Eden often, but never attempts to contact her. When Andrew returns home for his mother's funeral, his thoughts center on Eden. Andrew begins visiting Eden despite her mother's disapproval. It is during this time that Andrew comes to realize he has been in love with Eden since they were children. Eden too dwells on this unrequited love, wishing in her heart that she was the kind of person Andrew could love. The sexual abuse is like a barrier, however, and Eden cannot find a way around it. Eventually, the truth comes out and Andrew accepts Eden for who she is, turning unrequited love into love fulfilled.

## Jealousy

Edith Close loves her husband to distraction. Edith knows that her husband enjoys sex and that his long absences from her causes him to stray. However, Edith blocks this information from her conscious mind and revels in the time she spends with her



husband. One day, Edith is outside her house and she hears a plaintive cry. Edith investigates, assuming someone has dumped kittens outside her house. However, what Edith finds is an infant girl. When Jim comes home, he insists that they will keep the baby despite the fact that Edith does not want it.

As the child grows, Edith is forced to care for her. However, Edith is indifferent toward the child, even occasionally hostile to her. Edith does not like the attention the child takes from her and having to share her beloved husband's affection with this child. As the child grows, Edith's relationship with her deteriorates to the point that Edith tells her own adoptive child that she is the product of an affair her beloved husband had with a sixteen-year-old girl. This jealousy Edith feels grows as her daughter, Eden, grows. When Edith comes home one night and finds her beloved husband sneaking out of Eden's room, Edith's jealousy is pushed over the edge. Edith takes a shotgun from her bedroom and rushes to Eden's room, intent on killing the girl and taking her out of the picture. Jim, Edith's husband, refuses to allow Edith to kill his child. Jim jumps in front of the gun and is killed by his devoted wife's jealousy.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person. The entire novel is seen through the eyes of Andrew, a business man who has returned to his hometown to bury his mother. The reader is allowed access to the action that takes place in the plot as well as Andrew's thoughts and memories. Much of the novel takes place in Andrew's head, replaying memories of his childhood, especially in situations involving the daughter of the next door neighbors, a childhood friend. This access to Andrew's thoughts and emotions adds an omniscient element to the point of view. At the end of each chapter, there is a small snippet of narration that appears in italics. These snippets are thoughts that come from Andrew's neighbor, Eden Close, describing how she feels about Andrew and discussing elements of the events that left her blind. These short snippets are in the first person point of view.

The point of view of this novel works because the majority of the first half of the novel is flashbacks and memories. If not for the third person point of view, some of these flashbacks and memories would not make sense to the reader. The reader needs the guidance of the third person narrative to help understand that shift in tense and the impact these memories have on the characters in the book. The small snippets at the end of each chapter are in first person and this helps alert the reader that these sections are from the mind of a separate character. These snippets are different from the third person narration and as such need to be presented in a different format to prevent confusion on the part of the reader who would not expect some of this information to come from the main narrator, Andrew.

## Setting

The novel is set in a rural community in upstate New York. The farmhouses in which the Close family and Andrew's family live are what is left of a large farm once owned by two brothers. The houses were built in such a way that the occupants of one house could stick their head out the back door and call over to the occupants of the other house. It is clearly intended to promote intimacy between the two families while still allowing privacy. This situation causes some tension between Andrew's family and the Close family as they are not close friends and do not spend a great deal of time together. It is an enforced intimacy that not only leads to the friendship that develops between Andrew and Eden Close, but it also causes Andrew's family to become co-conspirators in the death of Jim Close.

The setting of this novel is unique in that it does cause this enforced intimacy between two families that might not have otherwise become friendly. Edith Close is a difficult woman to admire because she is a dark and dependent personality. Jim Close, as well, is a difficult person to like because he is lazy and often takes advantage of the kindness



of his neighbors. However, Eden Close is a likable child and becomes good friends with her neighbor, Andrew. Over time, this relationship changes for reasons that Andrew does not, as a child, understand. However, Andrew continues to be drawn into Eden's life, even after nineteen years of separation, creating the conflict that propels the plot of this novel.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. The novel contains few slang words and phrases, nothing that is not common in American English and simple for readers of all ages to comprehend. The language of the novel does not include foreign words or phrases, or other words that might complicate the comprehension of the novel for its readers. The language is appropriate to the time period in which it takes place, as well as the time in which it was written, and contains nothing that might need a reference book to help comprehend.

The language of this novel is appropriate to its plot. The novel utilizes simple English that is spoken by people of the region of New York in which the novel is written. The novel does not attempt to express accents or special slang that might be found in this region of the country. There are no foreign words and any slang used in the book is common enough that all readers will likely understand it. The language of this book works well with its subject and plot, leaving the reader able to concentrate on the plot without having to worry about unfamiliar words or phrases that might slow the flow of the book.

## Structure

The novel is divided into six chapters, each chapter containing more than twenty pages each. The novel is written in both exposition and dialogue, but the beginning of the novel contains almost all exposition as the main character spends the majority of the first two or three chapters alone. This includes some inner dialogue, but most of this section of the novel is flashbacks and memories that contain little dialogue. The novel is told in a linear fashion with all the flashbacks bracketed between moments that take place in the present.

The novel contains two clear plot lines. The first plot line is centered around Andrew. Andrew is a business man who is recently divorced and has returned to his childhood home to bury his mother and prepare the house for sale. Andrew begins recalling his childhood as he clears out the house, finding himself reluctant to leave his childhood home after being so ready to flee from it as a child. The second plot line centers on Eden Close, Andrew's neighbor and childhood friend. Eden was blinded in an incident that resulted in the death of her father. As Eden and Andrew renew their friendship after a nineteen year absence, Andrew begins to piece together the truth of what happened in Eden's house the night she was blinded. Both story lines come to a satisfying ending in the final chapter of the novel.





## Quotes

"As they had done nearly every hot night that summer, they had offered the fan to the boy, but the boy, aware that summer for the first time of his parents' age, had refused to take it from them." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"The last sound began then. It was reedy, a high-pitched wail, rising at first like a tendril of smoke into the sky—a female voice, though nearly inhuman, gathering momentum as it rose." Chapter 1, pg. 13

"Since he left home—and went to college, got married, fathered a child and separated from that wife and child—his room has evolved in the way the rooms of children do when the children aren't ever coming back." Chapter 1, pg. 25

"He looks at the marriage bed and sees, suddenly and unbidden, the image of a woman rolling over, turning her back on the man. But it is not his mother he is seeing; it is his wife."  
Chapter 1, pg. 35

"Something about the scene he had just witnessed wasn't right, wasn't the way it would have gone on T.V. He looked at the empty drive, and then he knew at least what the question was: Why had a fourteen-year-old girl been sent alone to the hospital. It was his mother who said it first. Where's Edith?" Chapter 1, pg. 44

"The more Edith ignored the child, the more Jim spoiled her, as if to redress the deficit—or perhaps it was the other way around: Edith meant unconsciously to temper his excess."  
Chapter 2, pgs. 95-96

"He felt in his mouth, for the first time in his life, the metallic taste of betrayal and longing. With it came the knowledge that the shape of things you had known and trusted as certain could be twisted, overnight, out of recognition." Chapter 2, pg. 119

"I said, Afraid?  
You shook your head.  
You said I might have been your sister."  
Chapter 2, pg. 120

"A person walks into a room and says hello, and your life takes a course for which you are not prepared. It's a tiny moment (almost—but not quite—unremarkable), the



beginning of a hundred thousand tiny moments and some larger ones. A random sperm meets a random egg and becomes your child, whom you love more than life itself. Yet the meeting, that infinitesimal beginning, is no more astonishing than the division of a cell." Chapter 3, pgs. 166-167

"Your father was a brave but foolish man." Chapter 3, pg. 191

"She is in some ways, astonishingly ordinary. What had he expected? Someone retarded? Deformed? A character in a dream? Rapunzel in a tower?" Chapter 4, pg. 207

"He takes his hand away. A voice cautions him, tells him that if he does this, there is no turning back. It is not a causal act; she is virtually a child. He sees her as a child, feels again the secret dread in himself, about to touch something he should not." Chapter 4, pg. 284

"His eyes fall to the chocolate floorboards by her feet. Somewhere on these floorboards, Jim died and Edith found him, and then his father found all of them. The ground lurches when he tries to bring Jim into focus. Soon his memories of Jim will have to be recast, redrawn again. And of Edith too, he thinks dizzily." Chapter 5, pgs. 342-343

"Your hands erase the memory of others.

A part of you is inside me, and I will always have that.

You have made me give up all the secrets, and I am lighter now.

You talk of days stretching after days, and you believe in them. I do not believe in them, but I believe in this day."

Chapter 6, pg. 381

## Topics for Discussion

Discuss Andrew. Who is Andrew? Why has he come home? What are his intentions now that he is home? How do those intentions change as the plot develops? Why do his plans change? What regrets does Andrew have regarding his parents? Why does Andrew have these regrets? Can Andrew change anything regarding these regrets? Does he?

Discuss Eden Close. Who is Eden? How did she lose her eyesight? How did Eden come to live with the Closes? How does Eden's adoptive mother feel about her child? Why does Eden still live with her adoptive mother? What other options does Eden have? What does Eden do to pass the time? What is special about this pastime?

Discuss Edith Close. Who is Edith? How did she come to be a mother? How does she feel about motherhood? How does she feel about Eden? What is the basis of Edith's feelings toward Eden? What is Edith's relationship with her husband like before Eden's arrival? How does it change after Eden's arrival? Why?

Discuss Jim Close. Who is Jim? What is his personality like? How does he often take advantage of his neighbor's kindness? Why? What kind of women does Jim like? Does Jim cheat on his wife? How does the reader know this?

How does Jim feel about his wife? How can the reader define his relationship with his wife? How does Jim feel about his daughter? Compare and contrast Jim's relationship with Eden and with Edith. How are they different? How are they similar? What accounts for the differences and similarities?

Discuss promiscuity. What is promiscuity? Why does Eden become promiscuous? What changes in Eden's home life that might explain this? Why does Andrew not know what the cause of this behavior is? Why does Eden hide the truth? Why does Eden think the truth will change the way Andrew feels about her? Does it? What does the truth help Andrew see about Eden?

Discuss jealousy. What is jealousy? Why does jealousy cause people to act in ways that might not do otherwise? Who in this novel displays jealousy? What is the cause of this jealousy? Is the jealousy reasonable? Why or why not? How could this jealous person have acted differently?

Why does Edith allow Eden to live with her after she is blinded? Why does Edith allow Eden to live relatively unharmed for nineteen years? Why does Edith try to kill Eden when she finds her with Andrew? How is this event parallel to another event? Why does Eden continue to live with Edith for so many years? What is the nature of their relationship as adults? Why does Eden feel dependent on Edith? Is she?