
Together In Death: Ethan Frome

Ethan Frome, written by Edith Wharton is a novel set in Starkfield, Massachusetts surrounding three characters, Ethan Frome, his wife Zeena Frome, and Mattie Silver. Ethan Frome was a man who suffered from an intense fear of being alone so he ended up making a rash decision, marrying Zeena. Soon after they got married, Zeena ended up getting deathly ill and her cousin, Mattie Silver, came to take care of her, then Ethan and Zeena's marriage took a turn for the worse. Ethan Frome and Mattie Silver end up falling in love and are "passionate or imaginative spirits, hungry for emotional and intellectual experience, who find themselves locked into a small closed system," as written by Edmund Wilson, this is why they decide to be together in death rather than "suffer a living death" in which they cannot be with one another.

Ethan Frome is locked in an unbearable marriage with a woman named Zeena, who he married just to get rid of the silence in his home, while he is in love with her cousin Mattie Silver. This is why Ethan is "locked into a small closed system." He so desperately wants to be with someone who "had an eye to see and an ear to hear," (Wharton, 33) someone who understood him, someone like Mattie. Ethan believes that, "Zeena herself, from an oppressive reality, had faded into an insubstantial shade. All his life was lived in the sight and sound of Mattie Silver, and he could no longer conceive of its being otherwise." (Wharton, 40) This shows that he does not care about Zeena anymore, but he cannot divorce her, because that would shatter society's standards of marriage. Since Ethan Frome is not allowed to be with Mattie, they decide to plan a suicide so they do not have to "suffer a living death."

Mattie Silver comes to Starkfield, Massachusetts to help her cousin Zeena with her illness but inevitably falls in love with Ethan Frome, even though he is a married man. It is wrong to love a married man, especially when he is married to your cousin, but she came at the wrong time, and he settled down to soon. Ethan ran from loneliness as it overtook him, and it caused him to end up marrying the wrong woman, at the wrong time. Since Mattie loved Ethan so much, she decided that she would rather them "destroy themselves by beating their heads against their prison," than "suffer a living death in resigning themselves to it." She hatched a plan with Ethan telling him that they should commit suicide to break away from society's rules and finally be able to be together, and Ethan agreed saying, 'What's the good of either of us going anywheres without the other one now?' (Wharton, 182)

In conclusion, Ethan Frome and Mattie Silver find themselves falling in love with each other even though it is wrong. They are "locked into a small closed system," and decide to commit suicide to get out of it. Unfortunately, the attempt just ends up significantly injuring both parties, so they end up having to "suffer a living death in resigning themselves to it."