

Desire Under the Elms Characters

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Character Analysis

Ephraim Cabot: Ephraim Cabot is an old, hard, and stubborn farmer. He owns a rocky farm in New England. He believes that hard work and land ownership are the only sources of power. He is strict, proud, and selfish. He never shows love to his sons. He only cares about his land.

Abbie Putnam: Abbie is Ephraim's third wife. She is much younger than him. She marries him mainly to get his farm. But later, she falls in love with Eben, Ephraim's youngest son. Her love leads to passion, guilt, and tragedy.

Eben: Eben is Maw and Ephraim Cabot's son. He is the half-brother of Simeon and Peter. He is 25 years old, young, and handsome. He is the only one who truly loves his dead mother. He hates his father for being cruel to her. When Abbie comes, he first hates her, too. But later, he falls deeply in love with her. Their forbidden love becomes the main cause of tragedy.

Simeon: Simeon is Ephraim Cabot's oldest son, whom Cabot had with his first wife. Simeon is 39 years old. He hates Cabot for making him work so hard digging stones out of the unforgiving farmland for his whole life. Simeon and Peter sell their share of the land to Eben and leave to find gold in California.

Peter: Peter is Ephraim Cabot's second-oldest son, whom Cabot had with his first wife. Peter is 37 years old, and, like his brother Simeon, he hates Cabot for making him work hard on the stony farm. Like Simeon, Peter also abandons the farm, searching for a new life.

The Baby: The baby is the child of Abbie and Eben. It becomes a symbol of their love and sin. Abbie kills the baby to prove her love for Eben, which leads to the final tragedy of the play.

Maw: Maw was Ephraim Cabot's second wife and Eben's mother. She died some years before the play begins. Her presence is still felt on the farm, as an oppressive, almost suffocating maternal energy. Eben cannot come out of her shadow. Maw's presence is symbolized by the Elm trees that keep the farmhouse in constant shadow.