

The Hedgerow

Anne Leigh Parrish

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In Anne Leigh Parrish's historical novel *The Hedgerow*, an enigmatic woman's professional goals clash with postwar American culture.

Circumstances compel Edith to take a room in Henry's lavish home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Soon, they begin a sexual relationship; Henry, a wealthy expatriate British lord, becomes persistent about marriage. Edith agrees at first, but her commitment to even the idea of marriage wavers. Edith's devotion to managing her bookstore is a further pressure point. As the couple gets to know each other, more intimate pressures are revealed.

Edith and Henry are complex individuals who struggle to grasp the lessons of their pasts. Edith enjoys casual sex with various partners; an acquaintance comments that she approaches sex "like a man." Still, her longings for emotional connection and security lead her into relationships that threaten her dedication to lasting professional success. In Edith's mind, work and love affairs can coexist, but events conspire to remind her of the dimensionless social expectations placed on women. She second-guesses many of her choices, which frustrates others.

As the book progresses, the question of whether Edith will marry Henry becomes more nagging, setting up intense conversations about the "right" choices for women. Henry's internal life, meanwhile, is obscured, known best through his own paradoxical behaviors—and by others' efforts to translate him to Edith. Indecisiveness and seeming contradictions fuel the book's momentum, as do its occasional thematic discussions of instability. Herein, identities are always being "recalculated," as the "sum of all of our sorrow, blended with all of our joy" shifts with experience.

An elegant, character-driven novel of paradoxes, *The Hedgerow* reveals universal human truths.

MICHELE SHARPE (July / August 2024)

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