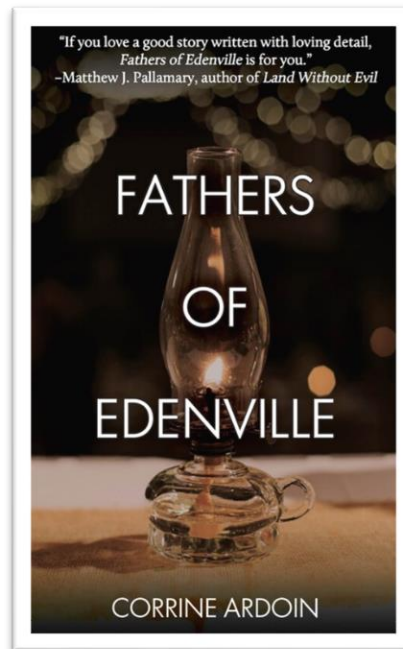




## “Book Review: *Fathers of Edenville*”

By *Samantha Hui*



**An effecting exploration of small-town literature, *Fathers of Edenville* asks you to pursue love and to stray from town gossip**

Corrine Ardoin nurtures her love for small towns in the novel *Fathers of Edenville*. Taking place around the early seventies, this novel navigates the mental and emotional effects of war through the eyes of sons and daughters, while also exploring the depths of small-town drama. It examines how unrequited love and a dedicated yet faithless devotion to one’s idols—whether that be religious, secular, or familial—can quickly corrode your strength. The author expertly intertwines the genres of romance, crime, and rural fiction for a story that tugs at heartstrings.



Told from a third person omniscient perspective, *Fathers of Edenville* jumps from each resident's experience in a small town called Edenville, but it primarily settles its focus on the characters of Sylvia Sumner and Tucker Stewart.

On one Easter Sunday, Tucker catches a glimpse of a woman he longs for (Sylvia) sneaking away for an assumed affair with his rival (Jim Hart). Though having convinced himself that he was content with being the town bachelor, Tucker must now confront the feelings he has so long attempted to repress. This reminder of unrequited love prompts him to finally express his feelings to Sylvia.

However, Sylvia's lust for Jim is far from the only obstacle Tucker must surpass in order to gain her affection. From Sylvia's husband to Jim's wife to various forms of town gossip, these obstacles leave Tucker virtually hopeless out of a fear and guilt for what others might think. Then, when Jim is found dead in his bathtub and Sylvia goes missing, those closely involved with the two have some truths to confront.

*Fathers of Edenville* carefully flows from character to character, plot to memory, and impulse to self-reflection. Contrary to its title, the novel is not so much about the fathers of Edenville but the effects the idolization of those father figures have on their now grown children. The characters are complex in that for all their attempts to do what they should, they grow anguished because they fail to do what they desire or what they must. Sylvia's aunt notes, "*That girl [Sylvia] has too much of her father in her,*" and Tucker is "*depraved like his father.*" In hearing these assertions about their fathers, Sylvia and Tucker grow up resenting these parts of themselves and, as you might expect, make the exact same mistakes their fathers did.

The novel can be a bit jarring for readers upon a first read. New characters with new motives are introduced in succeeding chapters, and with nearly every paragraph, the story seems to jump from the characters' present to a memory of the past. Though this sort of structure felt convoluted at first, I came to love Ardoin's way of storytelling. The quick movements from character to character feel as if each resident of Edenville takes hold of the narrative and presents it to readers through their singular experiences and perspectives. Though the multiplicity of characters can confuse the story, this very confusion reminds readers of the way gossip travels through a small town or school. Stories are warped and reworked. Some people hold more of the facts while others hold



more of the rumors. In this way, readers feel more immersed into Sylvia and Tucker's plights as if we ourselves are receiving the gossip from their neighbors.

Ardoin crafts her story in such a way that the most important feelings are the ones that go unspoken. This is a beautiful story that truly cares about small communities, a book that cares about community so much as to not only focus on the ease and pleasantries but on the critiques of it as well. I recommend *Fathers of Edenville* to those who want to escape, those who want to self-reflect, and especially those who, too, feel as if they have fallen from Eden.