



# All He Ever Wanted: A Novel

By Anita Shreve

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A man escaping from a hotel fire sees a woman standing beneath a tree. He approaches her and sets in motion a series of events that will change his life forever. Years later, traveling from New England to Florida by train, he reflects back on his obsession with this unknown and ultimately unknowable woman—his courtship of her, his marriage to her, and the unforgivable act that ripped their family apart. Spanning three decades from 1899 to 1933, *all he ever wanted* gives us a tale of marriage, betrayal, and the search for redemption. It has the unmatched attention to details of character, place, and emotion that have made Anita Shreve one of America's best-loved and bestselling novelists.

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## All He Ever Wanted: A Novel By Anita Shreve Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Amazon.com Review**

Anita Shreve's *All He Ever Wanted* reads like Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* told from the perspective of the husband. The wife gains a measure of freedom, but how does the repressive, abandoned husband feel about that freedom? Set in the early 1900s in the fictional New England college town of Thrupp, and narrated by the pompous Nicholas Van Tassel, *All He Ever Wanted* is at once an academic satire, a period novel, and a tale of suspense. Shreve's ability to nimbly hop through genres brings a liveliness to this story of love gone depressingly wrong. Van Tassel is an undistinguished professor of rhetoric at Thrupp College and a confirmed bachelor when he meets--in no less flamy a scenario than a hotel fire--the arresting Miss Etna Bliss. Immediately smitten, he woos and wins her. At least, he persuades her to become his wife. But Van Tassel hasn't really won her. Etna keeps her secrets and her feelings to herself. The extent of her withholding only becomes clear after a couple of kids and a decade or so of marriage. Then we find out that she's been creating a secret haven for herself all along. Van Tassel is in turn revealed--through his own priggish, puffed-up sentences--as something of a monster. The book is cleverly done; watching Etna through Van Tassel's eyes is like looking at beautiful bird from a hungry cat's point of view. But Van Tassel's voice might be too well written; he's pedantic and dull and snarky all at once, and by the end we find that we, like Etna, can't bear his company a minute longer. --*Claire Dederer*

### **From Publishers Weekly**

In bestsellers such as *Fortune's Rocks*, Shreve has revealed an impeccably sharp eye and a generous emotional sensitivity in describing the moment when a man and a woman become infatuated with each. She is less successful this time out, perhaps because the epiphany is one-sided. Escaping from a New Hampshire hotel fire at the turn of the 20th century, Prof. Nicholas Van Tassel catches sight of Etna Bliss and is instantly smitten. She does not reciprocate his feeling, for she has her own unrequited lust, for freedom and independence. That they marry guarantees tragedy. Nicholas tells the story in retrospect, writing feverishly on a train trip in 1933 to his sister's funeral in Florida. His pedantic style is full of parenthetical asides, portentous foreshadowing and rhetorical throat. His erotic swoon commands sympathy, until it carries him past any definition of decency. He will do anything to bring down Philip Asher, his academic rival and the brother of Etna's true love, Samuel. He plays on prevailing anti-Semitism (the Ashers are Jewish), and he persuades his daughter, Clara, to claim that Philip touched her improperly, which besmirches not only Philip's reputation but Clara's as well. We see Etna herself only secondhand, except for some correspondence with Philip reproduced toward the end of the tale. Credit the author for making the point that Etna and her sisters had too little autonomy even to tell their own stories, but filtering Etna's experience through Nicholas's sensibility deprives the novel of intimacy and immediacy. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

### **From Library Journal**

Set at the turn of the last century, like *Fortune's Rocks*, this work begins when a man fleeing a hotel fire encounters a mysterious woman who will ultimately become his wife. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

**Paul Erdmann:**

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