# A Place Near Eden by Nell Pierce

## Synopsis

How can we know the truth of our own lives? This question troubles Matilda, as she looks back on her time with her foster brother, Sem. Matilda remembers long hours at the swimming pool. Celeste, a girl who lived downstairs with her artist mother. Sem disappearing for hours, then days. Her father yelling in the driveway. A car coming to take Sem away.

Five years later, Matilda lives in Melbourne with her mother. Sem is now a memory she has locked away. Until, at a party, Matilda reconnects with Celeste and then Sem. Celeste and Matilda move out to the coast near Eden to house-sit. Sem follows, but as the long summer drags on, the atmosphere in the house becomes claustrophobic. When Sem starts disappearing again, Matilda finds herself on unsteady ground, haunted by their past.

One morning, after a night at the pub, Matilda wakes up scratched and hungover, with no memory of the previous night. Sem is once again gone. This time, for good. Matilda becomes consumed by an obsession to know if she is responsible for Sem's disappearance. But the truth struggles to fit into a neat story.

Part absorbing mystery, part riveting family drama, *A Place Near Eden* is a story of the pursuit of truth and the ways we fail those we love.

## Discussion questions

1. The story is told by Matilda as she recounts the events of her life. How did you find Matilda as the storyteller? Did you find yourself considering her as a victim or was she more in charge of her own actions?
2. What were your opinions on the character of Celeste? Did you find her controlling? Particularly of Matilda?
3. How about the character of Sem?
4. *“There was no mention in this version of the story of Sem’s jobs, or that he loved to cook, and wrote poetry. Peter didn’t account for the fact that lots of people get a bit lost, but still pull through. Or how people who seem fine can be the ones in trouble. (p.178)”* Peter used his documentary to develop a certain point of view. What did you think about his documentary?
5. How did you find the setting of Eden?
6. Did you like the ending? Did you find that the ending still had questions unanswered?