

Cold Comfort Farm Study Guide

Cold Comfort Farm by Stella Gibbons

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Plot Summary

Set primarily in Sussex, England, circa 1930s, *Cold Comfort Farm* is a parody of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century agricultural literature, such as novels by D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy. The main character, Flora Poste, is reminiscent of Jane Austen and Bronte heroines in many regards. Orphaned and broke at nineteen, she decides to live with relatives she has never met on a farm in Sussex. She discovers the Starkadders of Cold Comfort Farm are in a bad state as the farm is supposedly cursed and tightly controlled by the matriarch, Aunt Ada Doom, who never leaves her room. There is a general sense of depression and gloom, the very farm appearing like "a beast about to spring."

Abhorring messes similar to Jane Austen's *Emma*, Flora takes on the challenge to tidy up Cold Comfort Farm and everyone on it. The Starkadders believe they must never leave the farm or Aunt Ada Doom will have one of her fits of madness, but Flora can see the madness as a little too convenient. This madness supposedly is the result of something Aunt Ada saw in the woodshed when she was a child. Flora tackles each family member individually, despite Aunt Ada's distress: she changes her cousin Elfine from an artsy woodland sprite into a lady eligible for marriage to the wealthy man she loves; she helps her cousin Seth find a career in the talkies, his passion, through her Hollywood producer friend; she encourages religiously fanatic Uncle Amos to go on a preaching tour, getting him off the farm so her cousin Reuben can take it over as this is his greatest wish; and she sends her depressing Aunt Judith into therapy and off to explore European churches. Flora's biggest problem is Aunt Ada Doom, but the farm will never really be tidy as long as she is brooding in her room. Flora spends a day with her, managing to convince her there is a lot more fun to be had for a lady of wealth than being cooped up in a bedroom. Aunt Ada agrees and flies off to Paris on Elfine's wedding day. After all Flora's meddling has come to fruition and the farm is tidied up, Flora seeks her own happy ending. Like a fairytale, Charles, the man she loves, comes to pick her up in his airplane and they declare life-long love toward one another as they return to London.

There are a number of subplots that also take place. A writer staying in the nearest town, Mr. Mybug, develops a crush on Flora, but as he's rather fat and she doesn't care much for intellectuals, she does her best to avoid him. Fortunately, he meets one of the Starkadder women and marries her instead. The hired girl, Meriam, is another major subplot. She gets pregnant every spring when the "sukebind" blooms and has just had her fourth child by an unknown man. Flora teaches her about birth control which Meriam thinks is flying in the face of nature, but which her mother, Mrs. Beetle, condones. Meriam ends up marrying one of the farmhands.

The novel is best enjoyed by understanding it as a parody on rural literature and character archetypes as the story builds on a conventional structure toward a satisfying ending.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Set primarily in Sussex, England in the 1930s, *Cold Comfort Farm* is a parody of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century agricultural literature, such as novels by D.H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy. The main character, Flora Poste, goes to live with family members she has never met who live on Cold Comfort Farm. The place and the people are a mess so Flora uses her wits to tidy the farm and everyone on it.

Chapter One introduces Flora Poste. Flora's parents have recently died, leaving her with only one hundred pounds a year. The story begins two weeks after the funeral, when Flora goes to stay with her childhood friend, Mary Smiling, in London. Mary, a wealthy widower, invites Flora to stay with her until she can find a job and get her own flat, but Flora has other plans. Rather than work, she decides she will find relatives to stay with in exchange for her hundred pounds a year; she will change them to suit her needs, and then find a man to marry. Mary thinks it is a terrible plan and hopes that Flora will change her mind. That evening, they dine out with two gentlemen, including Flora's second cousin Charles, who is planning to become a parson. Charles offers to rescue Flora in his plane if her plan to stay with relatives doesn't work out. Flora has an obvious affection toward Charles but is determined and plans to write letters to her relatives the next day.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter One sets the tone for the book, which is known to be a parody on eighteenth/early nineteenth century English literature. In this case, the forsaken heroine left to depend on the kindness of others is rather scheming. She has no ambition or desire to work, so becoming a parasite on relatives seems a better choice, as long as she can change them to suit her needs. The dialogue between Mary and Flora is formal yet witty and silly. Descriptions of behavior and locations are also verbose in an amusing way with the apparent intention of poking fun at long winded passages in more serious literature. This chapter also sets up the heroine's goal—to find a home of sorts, never having had one of her own, being a boarding school child who spent most of her holidays with Mary's family.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Flora proceeds with her plan, despite Mary's disapproval. Mary goes out to look at a brassiere to possibly add to her massive collection. Meanwhile, Flora writes to a bachelor uncle in Scotland, an aunt in Worthing, a cousin in South Kensington, and distant relatives who live on a farm in Howling, Sussex, known as Cold Comfort Farm. She takes pains to stylize each letter to the relatives' personalities, but as she knows nothing of the ones in Sussex, she keeps that one very straightforward. Three days later, Flora receives replies from all the relatives and peruses them with Mary. They all welcome her except there are issues that Flora can't abide, such as having to share a room with a cousin or parrot. The letter from the relatives in Sussex is, however, intriguing. Flora's Aunt Judith Starkadder (who is actually Flora's cousin but is how she signs her letter) refers to a "great wrong" done to Flora's father by her husband. There is also a reference to that Flora has "rights" she is entitled to. Judith welcomes Flora to their "doomed house" but says she must never ask about this family mystery. Flora and Mary agree this is the most interesting option, though Mary believes Flora will return in a matter of weeks after experiencing farm life. Flora sends a message to say she will be taking the train to Sussex and asks about train schedules and who will be there to greet her.

Over the next few days, Flora and Mary go ice skating, to the zoo, and to parties accompanied by a number of Mary's many admirers, other wise known as Pioneer-Os. Finally, a return postcard arrives, dirty and with very poor handwriting. It has some odd verses and a mention that "there have always been Starkadders on Cold Comfort Farm". There is no reference to train schedules, but Flora plans to leave the next day. Mary helps try to figure out a train schedule but there seem no direct routes to Howling, so Flora must take the train to Beershorn, which is the nearest location. They go by car to the strain station and find Charles waiting with flowers. He reiterates his offer to help fly her away if the experience becomes too much. Flora feels disconcerted as she begins her journey to the unknown.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The story is set in motion as Flora makes up her mind to stay with the relatives on Cold Comfort Farm. There is also a sense of mystery about a wrong done to Flora's father, making the reader want to learn what might have taken place years before. Interestingly, the author chooses never to reveal this secret. A postcard also refers to the farm as "doomed", implying Flora is taking a personal risk in visiting them, adding to the melodramatic satire. Charles is also introduced. A seemingly minor character, he is mentioned a number of times but is not seen again until the end of the novel when he takes on an increasingly important role.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter three shifts in point of view and begins with a description of Cold Comfort Farm, located near Howling and two miles from the sea. It is a rather dreary collection of buildings, laid out in octagonal formation and predominately made of stone and flint. Over the centuries, the buildings were continually put up and torn down by various royalty, so little of the original architecture remains. Its rather bizarre structures over the years have given it the nickname, "The King's Whim". Adam Lambsbreath, an old farm hand, is sleeping in the dairy, which houses the cows—Graceless, Pointless, Feckless, and Aimless. Outside, a bellow from Big Business, the bull, wakes Adam, and he proceeds to milk the cows. Suddenly Judith Starkadder, an enormous woman who dons a red shawl, appears to inquire about the milk. She also tells Adam he should prepare to meet Flora at the train station later in the day. Adam is aghast and references the hidden family secret. He reminds her he hasn't driven the cart in almost sixty-five years, but Judith tells him he can drive to the station six times before the pick-up to refresh this skill. She returns to the farm kitchen where she finds her handsome son Seth and berates him for being out all night with one woman or another. Eleven farm hands, some related, others not, enter for breakfast. Among them are Judith's husband, Amos Starkadder, and their oldest son Reuben. Amos is highly religious in talk and prayer in a zealous, condemning way. After breakfast, the men go out in the rain to harvest swedes. Soon, Judith receives a wire from Flora indicating she will arrive on the six o'clock train. Judith tells Adam to be there at five. As Adam scrubs the dishes with a thorn twig, he hears a sound and catches a glimpse of a golden-haired woman in green skirts flying through the kitchen—Elfine, his "liddle bird". He describes her as wild, but his feelings toward her evidently run deep. He threatens to kill an unnamed man if a hair on Elfine's head is harmed.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter three centers on Cold Comfort Farm, aptly named for its dreariness and gloomy characters. All of the main Starkadders are introduced along with their main character traits—Judith as depressing, Amos as highly religious, Seth as a sexual bounder, Reuben as passionate about the farm, and Elfine as rather flighty and wild. Adam is also an important character and is amusingly dimwitted and dire. The thorn twig he uses to scrub the dishes is a recurring motif. He is much like the thorn twig—physically and emotionally—and seems to enjoy wallowing in suffering rather than make life any easier. The porridge the men eat for breakfast is also symbolic of the messiness of the family members' lives.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Adam tries to get out of his obligation of picking up Flora by feigning an attack, but is out-staged by Meriam, the hired girl, who goes into labor with her fourth illegitimate child. With no choice left, Adam does his practice runs in the buggy, led by the gelding, Viper, to and from the train station before his last journey to pick up Flora. His thoughts are consumed by Elfine and a man he surmises she is spending time with named Richard Hawk-Monitor. Adam is so consumed with his own thoughts that he doesn't notice Flora climb into the buggy until she is throwing out the straw bed. He argues with her to leave it alone, but Flora has her way. In virtual silence, they drive back to Comfort Farm. Flora feels a sense of dread as she clutches her overnight bag, her trunk to follow a day later. Adam calls her "Robert Post's child" in their few exchanges.

Once on the farm, Flora is met by Judith, who holds a lamp high in the darkness to observe her new tenant. At first Flora wonders if her make-up is askew, then chalks it up to being some new wonderment on the farm as Christopher Columbus must have been regarded when first observed by an Indian. Flora asks to go to her room with a fire and a morsel to eat before meeting her relatives. Judith reluctantly concedes. Once in her room with two boiled eggs, she is too exhausted to pay much attention to her surroundings and wonders about her choice in coming to the farm. However, she is determined not to turn back, if only to avoid Mary's "I told you so" expression. Nevertheless, she wires Mary that her worst fears have been realized and to send her gumboots.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In chapter four, rural suspicion and urban sophistication collide as Flora arrives on the farm. The buggy ride in the darkness adds a sense of melodrama as Flora becomes increasingly uneasy with her choice. She expresses a haughty attitude when comparing herself to Christopher Columbus and considers herself to be the first civilized person the Starkadders have laid eyes on, implying they are savages. Her task—to tidy the family up to suit her needs—seems next to impossible, but strong willed and determined, Flora is going to see it through. The chapter ends on a humorous note when Mary receives a telegram from Flora asking for her gumboots, an implication that she has arrived in a deep mess.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In the wee hours of morning, Flora wakes to hear Adam and another man named Reuben (her cousin) arguing outside her window. It seems one of the cows lost a leg in Adam's care and now will be worthless at market. Another farm hand, Mark Dolour, joins in the fight. Reuben accuses him of stealing dropped chicken feathers, which Mark admits he gives to his daughter for her doll's hat. Flora opens the window and politely asks the men to quiet down, which they do with "flabbergasted silence". Flora finally wakes at eight thirty and surveys her room, deciding she likes the rich mahogany furniture, mirrors, fireplace, and magnificent if dirty curtains. She goes downstairs for breakfast and finds Adam in the kitchen, cutting turnips and watching the livestock through an open door. Flora declines porridge and makes herself tea, bread and butter. Adam tells her that Cold Comfort Farm is cursed, that seed will not grow and the cows are barren. He also tells her of old Mrs. Starkadder, who hasn't left her room in twenty years. Flora suspects this is the relative she has heard of named Aunt Ada Doom. Flora observes Adam washing dishes with a twig and tells him she will buy him a mop as it would give him more time to spend with his beasts.

Suddenly, Elfine flies through the kitchen in a green cloak. Flora barely glimpses her and asks Adam about her. Adam describes Elfine as seventeen and wild, often gone for days at a time to wander the hills. She inquires when lunch will be served then goes to find Judith. She runs into Elfine, who rather stonily shows her to Judith's room, her hair wild and uncombed. Flora decides she must take Elfine in hand at once. She finds Judith in her room with a deck of cards. Photos of Seth cover the walls. Judith mentions the "wrong" done to Flora's father and how they would all atone in time, but refuses to share what that wrong is. Judith refuses to take Flora's money and says she can stay as a guest. Flora asks if she might have her curtains washed but Judith says the hired girl, Meriam, might have been able to do them but not now. Flora follows Judith's gaze out the window where there is a small hut at the end of "Nettle Flitch Field". Flora is told the sounds of a woman in distress are the sound of child birth. Judith tells her Meriam will be back at work the next day. From the rather odd conversation, Flora assumes that Meriam's children were fathered by Seth. She decides to visit her to inquire about the curtains. Outside, she sees a man she suspects is Reuben collecting chicken feathers on the ground, obviously to prevent Mark Dolour from stealing them.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The contrast between Flora and her relatives is humorous and vividly expressed when Flora politely asks the arguing men to quiet down. She learns much about the family from Adam, including the mysterious matriarch who hasn't left her room in twenty years. The Curse theme is also introduced and a sense of powerlessness for anything to prosper on the farm because of it. This, of course, is what Flora will go about changing.



Flora can't abide the twig Adam is using to wash dishes and, despite his protests, plans to buy him a small mop. When Flora sees Elfine, she immediately plans to work on her, thinking her clothes and hair are a shambles, never mind her flighty personality. Flora's meddling traits are evident, but in her mind there is nothing wrong with that as she unflinchingly sees herself as right in these types of matters. To begin physically tidying up, she wants her curtains washed, regardless that the hired help is in childbirth. Her desire for neatness overwhelms any sense of compassion. The photos of Seth in Judith's room show Judith's rather obsessive affection for her unworthy child. Judith also references the family secret but refuses to divulge any information.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Flora approaches the hut and enters. She discovers that Miriam had her baby the day before and it is with her mother. At first Meriam refuses to wash the curtains, but Flora gives her a lecture on how to avoid getting pregnant again and offers her money to wash the curtains. Meriam reluctantly agrees. Meriam's mother, Mrs. Beetle, enters and surprises Flora with her civility. Meriam complains about having to wash the curtains but her mother says that they will be washed the next day and that she will hang them herself. Mrs. Beetle tells Flora that she is raising her grandchildren to be in a jazz band, which Flora finds a bit shocking but at least an organized plan. After Flora leaves, Meriam tells her mother about the advice Flora gave and how she thinks it's wickedness since it flies "in the face of nature". Mrs. Beetle agrees but suggests it might be worth a try.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Meriam's character parodies works by writers such as D.H. Lawrence who expounded on sexuality in nature. Meriam is the embodiment of nature, a ripe, lusty creature ravaged by men and breeding new life every year like the beasts in the wild. Her mother, in contrast, has more refinement but, as Flora discovers, Mrs. Beetle is not originally from Sussex, which in her mind explains her civility. Despite Meriam's protest, Flora gets her way with the curtains and feels a self-satisfied sense of accomplishment.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next day, Flora goes into Howling and goes to its sole pub, the Condemn'd Man, in hopes of finding some lunch. However, the pub does not serve lunch except on rare, special days. She asks the landlady, Mrs. Murther, if she will cook a steak if she goes to purchase one. Mrs. Murther agrees and offers some apple tart and vegetables to go with it. Over lunch, Mrs. Murther tells her of a writer named Mr. Mybug who is staying at the inn. Flora is determined to avoid Mr. Mybug as, being an intellectual, he will undoubtedly fall in love with her. She returns to the farm, and at four o'clock she goes to the kitchen to see if there is tea being served. Since no one is about, she proceeds to make the tea herself. She lays out a number of cups and saucers as well as bread and butter.

Finally, Reuben enters and she offers him some tea. He eyes her with hostility, believing she plans to claim the farm, but finally relents and has some tea. Reuben is silent for a very long time but finally mentions how he "scranleted two hundred furrows". As she struggles in a difficult conversation with Reuben, Flora realizes he believes she has designs on the farm. She does her best to assure him she has no desire to own a farm. Reuben leaves in frosty silence. But Flora believes the next time they have such a conversation, Reuben will believe her. Later, as Flora is sewing by the fire, Adam enters. He puts a collection of twigs over the sink and talks about how there is no better way to wash dishes. Flora reminds herself to purchase a mop for him the next time she is in Howling. Finally, Seth enters with his usual swaggering manhood. Flora introduces herself as his cousin. Seth begins a conversation about how all that women want is to eat a man up. He says he eats women instead. Flora decides the best course of action is to change the conversation and asks what he does in the evenings. He says he goes to the "talkies", which is a passion. He brags about his vast collection of actress photographs. Seth leaves to go to a talkie. Flora spends a quiet evening in her room and concludes that her plans for tidying up Cold Comfort Far are coming along well. However, she realizes she will have to eat more meals with the Starkadders to get to know them better if her plans are to succeed.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In this chapter the reader learns more about Flora's cousins Reuben and Seth. Reuben's passion for the farm and Seth's passion for the talkies are made clear, and are seeds that will sprout in Flora's "tidy up" plans. Flora perceives Reuben as a sad case because he doesn't seem to find joy from anything except his zealous love of soil. Seth's passion surprises her as she assumed that being such a manly beast he liked women when he fact he doesn't much care for them. Although she feels like she has accomplished a lot—the curtains are washed—it is moving too slowly and she realizes she has to infuse herself more into the Starkadders lives to know them better. It is

based on their deep and unspoken desires that she concocts her plans, which makes her an empathetic character despite her meddling ways.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The following week Flora has a difficult time trying to get to know Cousin Amos better as the meals are eaten in virtual silence or fighting. She asks Amos if she can join him when he goes to preach at the Church of the Quivering Brethren in Beershorn and he agrees, even though he believes she is damned anyway. On the journey by buggy, Flora questions Amos about his preaching and suggests he preach to larger congregations to save more souls. Secretly, she thinks that tidying up the farm would be a lot simpler if he was on long preaching tours. At first, Amos thinks it would be vain to preach to larger crowds and says that vanity is a sin, but Flora points out it would be a bigger sin not to reach out to more than a handful of sinners. Amos is rather taken with the idea. The audience in the church reminds Flora of one she witnessed at an arty Japanese movie screening in London where she met a like-wise unenthused audience member name Earl P. Neck, a Hollywood producer with whom she becomes friends. Flora is impressed by Amos's presence and stamina as he condemns all the parishioners to burning hell where there won't be any butter to relieve the pain. After a while, Flora feels rather thirsty and claustrophobic, so she goes outside to find something else to do. She spots a tea-shop called Pam's Parlour and enters in the hopes of finding a coffee. But once she enters she sees it is occupied by a man who she vaguely remembers meeting at a London party—none other than Mr. Mybug.

Chapter 8 Analysis

As Amos is such an extreme character as a religious fanatic, Flora knows the only way to manage him is to get rid of him. She plants the seeds with the idea of a preaching tour. While not moved by his preaching, she admires his skill and style and considers him a true artist in his field. There is much humor in the church scenes and Amos's elaborate descriptions of hell and damnation. It is a side-show spectacle of sorts and therefore suited to touring.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

As Flora suspected, Mr. Mybug is pleased to see her and reminds her how they met at a London party. Over orange juice and biscuits, he tells her about the book he is writing. Based on three letters he has in his possession, he is out to prove that the Bronte brother, Branwell, in fact wrote *Wuthering Heights* and the other Bronte novels and was a man of genius suppressed by his drunken sisters. Flora finds it rather ludicrous but humors him to avoid any form of debate. She dreads any suggestion of seeing him again and keeps an eye on the church door, hoping Amos will emerge. Finally, Mr. Mybug suggests they go for a walk but Flora declines, saying she must not miss her ride home. The congregation eventually pours out and Flora makes her excuses to leave. Mr. Mybug thrusts a card in her hand before she goes. Amos immediately accuses her of being a fornicator, making her quite indignant. Amos and Flora only converse once on the ride home. He tells her she "missed a good deal" by not being there for the "quivering". Flora again suggests the plan about touring to larger congregations in a Ford van. Back in her room, she looks at Mr. Mybug's card and discovers his name is in fact Meyerburg.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Mr. Mybug is a parody of smug literary writers and references authors like D.H. Lawrence, who he tries to emulate, especially later in the novel when he expresses sexuality in nature. His ludicrous assumptions on Branwell are based on three short letters to an aunt with mundane information which he reads far deeper than their intention, essentially making a lot of to do about nothing. Flora finds him dull and ill-informed but is socially graceful as always. She shudders at the idea of seeing him again, but it seems it will be inevitable in such a small rural setting.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter ten begins in the month of March. Flora has been on the farm a month but has not made the progress she hoped. She gave Adam a mop to clean the dishes, but he was so fascinated by its beauty he decided to hang it over the sink to admire and keeps using his twigs for the dishes. On her daily walks, Flora keeps an eye out for Elfine but never has a chance to speak to her. She is keen to fix her clothing and hair to make her eligible for marriage to the man she admires, Richard Hawk-Monitor. She doubts Richard would be interested in Elfine otherwise. She considers throwing Elfine in front of Mr. Mybug but realizes that would be a bad idea and for now he is in love with her so it wouldn't work. The chapter then dramatically changes in tone to Aunt Ada Doom's perspective. She keeps recalling an incident she witnessed in a shed when she was a little girl that forever changed her life. It is the reason she is cloistered in her room and controls the family, not allowing them to leave Cold Comfort Farm. She rather likes the arrangement, getting her meals brought to her room every day. But her mind is constantly on that one pivotal moment in her life, that moment she witnessed in the shed.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Flora is frustrated at the slow progress of her tidy up efforts and is beginning to focus on Elfine. A major theme of the Dominant Matriarch is introduced. In this chapter, it is the first time that Aunt Ada Doom is glimpsed as the writing shifts to her in a first person voice. Her rambling thoughts keep going back to an event she witnessed in a shed, a mystery which, like the wrong done to Robert Post, teases the reader but is never revealed. The madness from this event is the tool Aunt Ada uses to dominate and control her family, claiming she will go madder if any of them leave. Through her voice it is clear that the madness has certain advantages and is thus pretentious.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

On her way for a morning walk, Flora sees Reuben and talks to him about her idea of Amos preaching to the masses. She explains that this way the person who runs the farm while he is gone should be the natural heir if it is well managed. It takes Reuben a while to realize she is speaking of him, but once it sinks in he thinks it is a good idea and plans to work on Amos himself. On her walk, Flora recalls walks the previous three days accompanied by Mr. Mybug (she can't think of him by his real name). He can talk of nothing other than sex and sees it in all of nature, the hills reminding him of breasts and the spring buds of nipples. Flora is glad he is not with her on this particular day. She runs into Elfine behind a shepherd's hut and finally has a chance to speak to her. Elfine tells Flora of a farmhand named Urk who is always watching her and whom she thinks Aunt Ada Doom is planning for her to marry. As Flora suspected, Elfine enjoys writing poetry and talks much about love. Flora gets her to confide about Richard (Dick) Hawk-Monitor and finds out there will be a big party on his twenty-first birthday, a month later. Flora says she will secure them invites to Dick's party through her London friend Claud Hart-Harris, help Elfine get a new frock, and fix her up suitably. Elfine is excited and pleased.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mr. Mybug shows his yearning to be like D.H. Lawrence by expressing his views on sex and nature during his walks with Flora. He assumes her lack of interest and inability to see nature as he does means she is cold and frigid. The truth is, Flora knows if she gave him an inch he would take it, so she simply doesn't participate in those discussions. Running into Elfine helps her speed up her goals, and she zealously takes on the task of turning the young sprite into a sophisticated young lady. This is part of a Pygmalion Theme, with Flora playing Henry Higgins and Elfine (and other family members) serving as Eliza Doolittle.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Flora's London friend Claud Hart-Harris knows the Hawk-Monitors and agrees to arrange the invites. He describes Mrs. Hawk-Monitor as a darling, which gives Flora pause in her scheme, wondering if it is a good idea to throw Elfine on her only son. To counteract her feelings of guilt, she throws herself into reworking Elfine into being a Hawk-Monitor sort, making her forsake shawls and poetry and educating her on the intricacies of contemporary fashion. With less than a month before the party, Flora puts her heart and soul into the project, despite other distractions. On an errand in town, she runs into a Starkadder she barely recognizes as she waits for the bus. It is Harkaway, the relative that is sent into town once a week to do a bank errand. He offers Flora a ride and confides that he takes the buggy to save up the pitiful bus money he is given by Aunt Ada Doom each week. He takes delight in jingling his prized money in his pocket. On the journey home he tells Flora of how the well that is being built went amuck when a fight broke out, sending one of the men tumbling down, bricks and all. He also tells her about the many wives being secreted in the village lest Aunt Ada Doom finds out about them. Flora is surprised and overwhelmed about more Starkadder women who will inevitably need her attention. For now, she decides to maintain her focus on Elfine.

Since spring is a busy time on the farm, no one seems to notice the time Flora spends with Elfine while coaching her on the finer arts of civility. She also solicits Seth to be Elfine's chaperone, a role he eagerly takes on. Claud has agreed to be Flora's chaperone and is intrigued and amused by her plans. Meanwhile, Flora can't help notice that the bull, Big Business, is going stir crazy in his barn confinement and his noises are driving her crazy. She convinces Mrs. Beetle to help her lure him into the field. Mrs. Beetle agrees to do so from a second-story window. Despite her fear, Flora manages to get the bull into the field. Suddenly, Urk arrives with the post, including the invitation to Dick's party. Flora snatches it from him, but not without a warning from him that he knows something is going on and threatens to hurt anyone who stands in his way. Realizing there is no time to be lost, Flora decides to whisk Elfine to London for her dress fitting and new hairdo. As they prepare to take off, everyone on the farm begins noticing Big Business in the field, all asking who let him out. Flora has a note posted on the door to claim she did it so they won't start blaming each other and get into unnecessary fights.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Flora shows a twinge of conscience when she discovers Dick's mother is a darling, but continues the Pygmalion Theme to transform Elfine and rid her of bad habits, such as writing poetry. The fact that Dick's mother is a darling pushes Flora all the harder in her task. Elfine plans to continue writing poetry in secret but otherwise seems to enjoy the

changes. Nothing will stand in Flora's way of putting the farm in order, including a giant bull. She takes charge by sending the bull into the field, controlling him as she is doing everything on the farm through sheer will. The Starkadders aren't used to change and it creates quite a stir when the bull is let out of the barn.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Flora and Elfine spend the day in London. Elfine has her hair cut elegantly shorter and is fitted for a white satin gown by Flora's world-famous dressmaker. They have lunch with Flora's friend Julia. Elfine admits that being fitted for a dress is much more fun than poetry. Flora secures rooms for them at the exclusive New River Club as they have to wait until the next morning to pick up the dress. Flora spends the afternoon listening to a Mozart concert while Julia takes Elfine for a petticoat and shoes. That evening, they all go to the theater. Flora observes Elfine with satisfaction—she now looks "normal" but with feminine qualities.

They return about 5 pm the next day. Surprisingly, Seth is at the station to meet them with the buggy, and on the way home they stop to arrange a car for the party. The car will pick up Claud Hart-Harris on the way to the farm. Seth says he is happy to be going to a dance where all the women won't be after him. He prefers talkies to women and can't stand it if they try to talk in the middle of one. Flora resolves to solve Seth's problem next. She has a letter in her handbag from her producer friend, Mr. Earl P. Neck, who plans to motor down in the next few days for a visit. Flora plans to introduce him to Seth. Amazingly, no one has remarked on the girls' disappearance. The following day, the cousins get ready for the party. Flora worries that Aunt Ada Doom will find out about it. She notices a deadly nightshade has been put around the mantelpiece and a wreath of sukebind over the fireplace. The sukebind buds are long and pink. Flora wonders if when the sukebind buds open, all the trouble begins.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Elfine continues her Henry Higgins role with Elfine, who relishes in the girlish experiences. Flora begins to see Seth as more than the archetype she had in her mind and realizes there is more substance to him than she supposed. He is high on her tidy up list. Aunt Ada will be her biggest challenge, fighting the Dominant Matriarch will be like taking out the queen bee in this hornets' nest. The sukebind is a recurring symbol for the dark, repressive, gloomy aspects of the farm. It represents trouble and chaos. It appears or is mentioned many times in the novel. Flora can sense that the fact that it now garnishes the farm spells impending danger.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Chapter fourteen begins from Aunt Ada Doom's perspective. Feeling restless, she decides to descend downstairs, even if it is not on one of the two days a year she normally does so. Her daughter Judith helps her dress for the occasion. Meanwhile, Flora spends an hour helping Elfine get dressed for the party before she can prepare her own wardrobe. With an hour to wait before the car arrives, Flora is agitated and even reading Pensees doesn't calm her nerves. She imagines everything that could go wrong, the worst of which would be Richard Hawk-Monitor not proposing to Elfine. The perspective shifts momentarily back to Aunt Ada, who is still getting dressed, with memories flooding in her mind. Elfine begins to feel sick with worry but then there is a knock at the door. Seth stands there in his dinner jacket which in no way disguises his animalistic features. He whispers that the car is coming. After ensuring that Urk is nowhere in sight, the trio creep downstairs and outside. They see the car pulling up with Claude inside. Seth carries the women to the car so they don't muddy their dresses. Once in the car, Flora glances back at the farmhouse and notices a shadow moving in Aunt Ada's room. After they take off, Claud is extremely curious so Flora fills him in on the family affairs surrounding the party.

They arrive at the Godmere, where the large party is taking place. As they mount the steps on a red carpet, Flora hears her name called and turns to see Mr. Mybug, looking rather fat and ruffled. Flora feels sorry for him and simply waves politely so as not to detract attention from Elfine. She thinks of Charles, who is so neat and handsome in comparison. The Godmere had been designed with two sets of stairs, one leading up to the greeting area, the second leading down to the ballroom. Flora is ecstatic, knowing this is the best way to showcase Elfine's statuesque grand entrance, especially as all the guests of importance are already inside. At the top, they greet Richard's mother and his sister, Joan. Mrs. Hawk-Monitor is rather startled by Elfine's change of appearance. Flora and her entourage descend the stairs just as a waltz is ending. As Flora hoped, Dick is agog on seeing Elfine. Flora is especially pleased and smug when she watches them dance and hears many praises about Elfine's beauty. Seth also enjoys the evening, quickly taken possession of by a group of young Londoners who carry him off to supper. The only sour spot in the evening is a disturbance, which turns out to be Mr. Mybug trying to crash the party. The evening ends with Elfine and Richard telling Flora they are engaged. Flora and Claud wonder how Mrs. Hawk-Monitor will react to the news.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The tension builds as Aunt Ada plans to descend on the very night the young Starkadders, Seth and Elfine, break her strict laws, such as going to a dance. The dance is like Cinderella's ball and Flora's magic seems to have done the trick. Dick is



smitten enough by the new Elfine to propose, obviously a rather shallow man. The magic does seem precarious as Dick's mother has yet to hear the news. There is a sense in this chapter that the evening is building to a big bang between the party and return to the farm.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

To Flora's relief and excitement, the ball ends with Dick announcing his engagement to Elfine. Flora feels reluctantly compelled to speak with Mrs. Hawk-Monitor, assuming she might be in a bit of shock. A woman of equal social grace, Flora honestly advises Dick's mother to keep Elfine away from her family until the nuptials for everyone's sake, and to arrange the wedding as soon as possible as there will undoubtedly be opposition from the Starkadder front. After the party, Flora, Elfine, and Seth head home in the rented car. Seth warns them that Aunt Ada will be less than pleased to hear about Elfine's engagement. Flora isn't that worried until Seth points to the farm house and Flora notices every light is ablaze.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Flora's goal for Elfine appears to have been accomplished; however, it is fraught with obstacles as it is well known Aunt Ada Doom won't approve of the marriage. Flora ensures that Elfine will be whisked away from the family as soon as possible for the goal to be realized. As they return home, Flora knows that a showdown is inevitable, as the lights indicate everyone is waiting to confront them.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Elfine and Seth realize that their grandmother, Aunt Ada Doom, has chosen this night of all nights to have the Counting, a time when she sees what Starkadders are still around or alive. Flora tells them that she will do all the talking when they enter as she anticipates they're "in for it". Flora knocks and Urk answers the door, his rage and angst showing in his face. The entire Starkadder clan is grouped in front of the fireplace and the sukebind, now in full bloom, gives off a pungent smell. There is an almost unbearable silence and the atmosphere reminds Flora of "the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's". Flora chirps up casually, asking if there might be any sandwiches. Judith says there is food on the table but tells Flora she must first meet Aunt Ada Doom. Aunt Ada sits in a chair, clutching a copy of the "Milk Producers' Weekly Bulletin and Cowkeepers' Guide". Her first words to Flora are, "I saw something nasty in the woodshed". Aunt Ada proceeds to act as if she is having one of her "fits" but Flora doesn't buy it. Aunt Ada rants on about how they all want to leave her and how she will never allow it as "there have always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort Farm". She asks for Seth and questions the dinner jacket he is wearing. Flora states clearly that they have been to the Hawk-Monitor party and what's more, Elfine is engaged to be married in about a month. Urk goes berserk while Meriam tries to comfort him. Aunt Ada begins swinging her bulleting at everyone, swearing she will go mad and rambling on about seeing something in the woodshed. Nonplussed, Flora takes Elfine to the table and fixes them some bread and butter. She notices other females about—the other Starkadder wives and relatives. One goggle-eyed young woman, Rennett, is weeping in a cupboard and wet from having thrown herself down the well, a frequent event when taunted about being a spinster. Suddenly, a thundering clatter ensues as Amos tells Aunt Ada that he is going on a preaching tour. Aunt Ada uses all her skills to make him feel guilty for her inevitable madness but he is unmoved, his other mission being more important. He heads out the door and away from the clan.

Meanwhile, Urk drags Meriam forward, declaring he will have her instead of Elfine. Mrs. Beetle pipes up, implying that Meriam's children are his. She tells her daughter not to take him unless she wants to, and Meriam decides she does. Urk tries to pick her up and it is only with a great deal of effort that he manages the feat and barrels out the door with her. By now it is four in the morning and Elfine has fallen asleep. Flora is equally exhausted while Aunt Ada drones on how Elfine and Amos have left and she will be alone in the woodshed. Fortunately, Rueben tells them it's time for bed and draws Flora and Elfine out. He tells Flora that he is grateful for getting Amos out of the way and won't forget it. They listen to another fight break out in the kitchen but Flora is too tired to care what it's about. Once in her room, she falls instantly asleep.



Chapter 16 Analysis

Inside, the sukebind is in full bloom, symbolizing the trouble they are in. It is the first time Flora has seen Aunt Ada and she disregards her ranting about woodsheds by being polite yet straightforward about Elfine's engagement. Brazened, Amos announces he is leaving that night on a preaching tour. The Dominant Matriarch is considerably weakened as two Starkadders are planning to leave Cold Comfort Farm and her mad fits don't seem to have the same effect as they once had. She expresses her fear of ending up alone in the woodshed. Reuben becomes the savior, whisking Flora and Elfine away, as he is steeped in gratitude to have his domineering father out of the way.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The next day, albeit a Sunday, Reuben is hard at work as he now sees himself as primarily responsible for the farm. Adam is in shock about Elfine's engagement and sings wedding songs as he milks the cows. Rennett is the only Starkadder woman not living on the farm to stay there that day. Aunt Ada Doom is back in her room and no one dares go near her. Urk has not been seen since hauling Meriam away. Flora sleeps well into the afternoon and would have slept longer except Ms. Beetle knocks on the door to tell her she has visitors; Mr. Mybug and Mr. Neck are downstairs. Once refreshed and dressed, Flora finds the men in her parlor. Mr. Mybug seems a bit glum about Mr. Neck's presence. They enjoy tea and Flora waits for the right moment to introduce Seth to Mr. Neck. He talks about his ill luck in finding a suitable male star, a new Gary Cooper sort with manly charisma. Soon, Seth silently enters. When Mr. Neck spots him, he is taken aback. Flora happily introduces them. Once Seth speaks, it's a clinched deal; Mr. Neck wants him in the Hollywood talkies. Seth is beyond rapture. Mr. Neck announces he will make him a movie star but they must leave for America that evening. Flora instructs Seth to pack his bags and after he leaves, explains the family dynamics to Mr. Neck. He promises to send Aunt Ada Doom \$5,000 from the first picture that Seth appears in.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Like Seth's talkies, Flora is deftly directing the Starkadder clan with the skilled precision of a film director. She has now succeeded at three of her goals—tidying up affairs with Elfine, Amos, and Seth. The Starkadders, once so guardedly oppressed, are breaking up swiftly and growing stronger in resisting Aunt Ada's iron fist.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Seth returns quickly, ready to head off to his new life. Mr. Neck whisks him to his car, afraid that there will be interference. Flora and Mr. Mybug say their goodbyes to Seth and Mr. Neck when there is a cry from a window above yelling about something nasty in the woodshed. Naturally, it is Aunt Ada with Judith shadowing her in misery. Rennet is also with them. Flora rushes Seth and Mr. Neck off to avoid a scene as Aunt Ada continues to rant out the window about going mad and not being able to bear it. Judith also shouts for Seth to stay, but he is determined. Mr. Neck chastises Aunt Ada on the woodshed "line" being old hat before driving Seth away. The narrative implies that Seth will indeed be a famous actress and to Flora, "as unreal as Achilles". After he leaves, the women continue to wail. Mr. Mybug, who had been choking on a cake after observing Seth's sudden success, catches a glimpse of Rennett and asks about her. He is taken by her "brittle, hare-like quality". Rennett is equally smitten. Mr. Mybug asks her to join him for a walk. Rennett happily obliges.

Feeling suddenly tired, Flora goes to her parlor. She worries things are happening too quickly and soon no one will be left on the farm. Mrs. Beetle is there and tells Flora that Dick picked Elfine up in his car to stay at his estate until the wedding. She also tells Flora that Urk and Meriam will be getting married, despite her husband Agony's protests. Aunt Ada wasn't too pleased, either. Flora asks if she knows what Aunt Ada saw in the woodshed as a child, but Mrs. Beetle hasn't the answer. They talk about Seth leaving for Hollywood and what a lot of gossip Mrs. Beetle will have for Agony that evening. After she leaves, Flora settles in for the evening, satisfied with all the events that have transpired. She is especially pleased when a postcard arrives in the evening post. It is from Amos, full of excitement about his preaching and asking for his flannel shirts to be sent.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Aunt Ada Doom is beside herself as she sees her family members taking off one by one, especially her beloved grandson Seth. Mr. Neck calls her on her lunacy act, citing it as an over-used and passé theme. It seems that change is on a roll and now there is nothing that Aunt Ada can do to reverse its course. The Dominant Matriarch has lost her powers. Meanwhile, a minor subplot plays out between Mr. Mybug and Rennett, rather a convenient settling of his affairs and a relief for Flora.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Life on the farm assumes a sense of normalcy in May as the sun shines, leaves burst to full bloom, and mating season begins. Judith is wallowing in her misery. She has veiled all two hundred photos of Seth with black cloth and finds no meaning left in her life. Aunt Ada Doom keeps to her room, full of hate and anger and wondering if more Starkadders will be leaving the farm. She blames everything on Flora, and the wrong doing against her father, Robert Poste, "come back to roost". Flora is happy as she observes Reuben making vast improvements to the farm. She joins him on a trip to Godmere to pick out fertilizers and grinders. Over lunch, she asks where he got the money for the supplies. Reuben explains that he has been falsifying the farm books for nearly five years and squirreling away the money. Reuben is worried that Amos will return and ruin things, but Flora produces a postcard from Amos saying he is going to America and Reuben can have the farm. Reuben suddenly asks if she would consider marrying him. Flora is moved but tells him she would be no good as a farmer's wife. She suggests Mark Dolour's daughter, who is only fifteen but will be the right age in a few years, by which time the farm should be very successful. Reuben agrees that since his chicken feathers have been covering her doll's hats for years (those stolen by her father), it is only right she should end up with the chickens, too.

Flora visits Elfine a few times, and fortunately Mrs. Hawk-Monitor has warmed up to her. The wedding has been set for June 14th and Mrs. Hawk-Monitor wants the reception to be held at the farm. Flora is horrified at all the possibilities that could go wrong. At least the farm house is now tidy and the other Starkadder men, feeling braver, have brought their women to the farm. She feels she still needs to sort out Judith, Adam, and Aunt Ada Doom (the biggest problem) before the farm can be considered truly tidy. She decides to tackle Judith next. Flora invites her to London for some shopping and lunch with an Austrian doctor. Although Judith doesn't reply, Flora instructs her to be ready by nine the next morning. That evening, as Flora is writing a letter to Charles, she receives a wire from Dr. Adolph Mudel, confirming lunch the next day.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Flora grows closer to Reuben and admires the fact that for years he had been falsifying the books for the day he might run the farm. He takes on his new responsibilities with relish. Flora knows her work is not done and has her list of the last few members to tackle, saving the Dominant Matriarch for last. When it is decided that Elfine's reception will be held at the farm, there is much cause for concern. The rest of the novel builds up to this day, while Flora realizes she has limited time for her final showdown with Aunt Ada.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

The trip to London with Judith is a success, but not without its moments. Concerned travelers make inquiries as Judith refers to herself as a "Used Gourd and a Rind". They have lunch at Grimaldi's with Dr. Mudel, a state psycho-analyst. In his profession, he transfers people's fixations onto more positive and harmless interests, such as gardening. After lunch, Dr. Mudel tells Flora that he plans to take Judith to a nursing home for six months and give her an interest in old churches. He assures Flora that Judith will be happy, which Flora questions. However, Judith seems quite content to go with the doctor and Flora suggests after her nursing home stay that she travel and visit the sights of Europe, particularly the old churches. Judith worries about Amos but Flora reminds her he is off to America and will let her know when he plans to come back. Judith drives off with Dr. Mudel looking content. Flora also arranged to have five dirty red shawls and hairpins delivered to the nursing home as well as enough money for Judith to enjoy herself over the next six months.

Flora returns to the farm feeling quite satisfied. She notices that the farmhouse no longer looks gloomy and depressing. The farm now looks clean and airy with fresh curtains on most of the windows. However, Flora knows she will not feel truly satisfied until she has dealt with Aunt Ada. Mrs. Beetle tells Flora that Aunt Ada had a fit after Judith left but managed to keep her appetite. Flora enters the kitchen and finds a letter from Charles. Concerned about Elfine's wedding preparations, she asks Reuben for money to get decorations and a feast. Reuben happily obliges but expresses concern about his grandmother. Flora insists that the sukebind be removed and goes about with the preparations. She supervises a massive clean, the first it's had in a hundred years. Meanwhile, she discovers that Mr. Mybug had proposed to Rennett and they plan to have a registry wedding and share in Elfine's reception. Flora spends more time reading the Higher Common Sense as she prepares to deal with Aunt Ada. It advises her to utilize her intuition to "know" when the moment would come. One evening, the moment comes in a flash and Flora formulates a plan within seconds. She writes a telegram to Claude Hart-Harris requesting the latest copy of Vogue, information on a hotel in Paris, and photos of Fanny Ward. The parcel arrives the next day. Flora asks Mrs. Beetle for the tray with Aunt Ada's lunch and lays the materials on it. She says she will take lunch and if she doesn't return, instructs Mrs. Beetle on the other meals and drinks to bring to the room throughout the day. Mrs. Beetle and the other Starkadder women watch in wonder as Flora ascends the stairs and enters Aunt Ada's room. Time ticks on and the women gossip about what might be going on. At 10 pm, Flora finally comes down looking a little pale and tired. She assures everyone that everything has been settled and there will be no fuss at the wedding. She tells them there will be a lovely surprise on the wedding day. Exhausted, she goes to bed.



Chapter 20 Analysis

This is an intense chapter with much going on. Flora succeeds in taking care of Judith's depression and fixation on her son, Seth, yet another Starkadder gone from the farm. The farm, like the characters that inhabit it, is also changing. The gloom is turning to sunshine and Flora has the sukebind thrown out, a symbolic throwing out of the family's old troubles. Using her guides as a bible for action, she finally has the showdown with Aunt Ada. Interestingly, it is not shown. There are allusions to what might be taking place while they are together, given the copy of Vogue and Paris hotel brochure, but their conversations are never revealed. The event causes quite a stir on the farm, though everyone welcomes all the changes that are transpiring.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Flora and Mrs. Beetle work busily to decorate the farm with flowers under sunny skies. Adam has made wreaths as garlands for the cows' horns. He discovers that the cows no longer have horns so he puts the wreaths around their necks and tails. The rest of the family is busy putting champagne in the cellar, arranging trestle tables, and unpacking silver and linen sent from a London store. They all eat a simple breakfast in the dairy as the kitchen is being prepared for the reception. Flora tells them that she has spoken to Aunt Ada and all she wants for breakfast is a "Hell's Angel", a concoction with brandy, an egg, some cream and ice. She gives it to Mrs. Beetle to take upstairs. Reuben worries his grandmother has gone mad and will ruin the wedding, but Flora tells him not to worry. They continue to work like demons until the farm looks very festive and the banquet (one table for the County folk and one for the Starkadder clan) has been arranged. Flora visits Aunt Ada, then dresses for the wedding. Back in the kitchen she finds Mr. Mybug and Rennett, who are now married. The entire family (except Aunt Ada) make their way to the church, which is decorated with white flowers. The wedding goes off without a hitch, though Rennett cries because she didn't have a pretty wedding. Mr. Mybug quickly promises one before they head back to the farm for the reception.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Elfine's wedding is the crowning glory of Flora's work. The pretty farm and sunny skies affirm that all is finally well on Cold Comfort Farm. Flora takes great pride in the accomplishments she has achieved. She keeps the discussions in her meetings with Aunt Ada secret, teasing the reader to discover how Aunt Ada has been transformed. At this point the reader also doesn't know what changes will happen for Adam, who is also on Flora's to-do list.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

When the wedding party returns to the farm, Adam gives Elfine a nest with four pink eggs, telling her it will help her bear four children. As they enter the kitchen for the feast, an older woman in a grand leather flying kit rises from a chair and welcomes the guests to Cold Comfort Farm. To everyone's amazement, it is Aunt Ada Doom! Aunt Ada is pleased with the shocked attention she receives but says they must get on with the feast as a plane is picking her up for Paris in less than an hour. This creates quite another stir amongst the Starkadder clan. Aunt Ada keeps thanking Flora, excited about her upcoming trip to Paris. Despite the glory of the conquest, Flora wants to ask about what wrong Amos did to her father and what her rights are. Aunt Ada whispers in her ear, to which Flora replies, "And did the goat die?" But then Aunt Ada's attention is diverted and Flora never gets the answers she was looking for. Elfine tells Aunt Ada that Adam will be coming to live with her and her husband to help take care of their cows, and the Cold Comfort cows shall go there as well, Flora's solution for Adam's life. Aunt Ada is happy with the plan. Suddenly, the plane arrives and everyone rushes out to see Aunt Ada off.

Flora goes with Elfine to help her change, as she and Dick are expecting a plane to whisk them away in a few hours. Flora gives Elfine a copy of "The Higher Common Sense" to guide her in her new civilized life. Soon Elfine is off and Mrs. Beetle starts to tidy up. The party finally ends, but Flora feels a sense of agitation. She maintains a cheery countenance while saying goodbye to the final guests, receiving numerous invitations for dinners and teas. She asks the best man, Ralph Pent-Hartigan, for a ride to town to use the telephone. He asks her to dinner but she tells him she has made up her mind to leave the farm that evening. She calls Charles from a phone booth and tells him she's tidied everything up and is ready to leave if he can fly down to get her. He promises to be there at eight o'clock.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Elfine's wedding reception is the pinnacle of the novel and the resolution of Flora's goal where the farm and its inhabitants have been tidied up according to her definitions. Aunt Ada's transformation is quite shocking and not highly credible, but offers a satisfying conclusion. Like several Jane Austen heroines, Flora has been so consumed with fixing the affairs of others, she has not paid much attention to herself. At the end the party, she has no goals left on the farm and feels restless as a result. She has often thought of Charles in this time and comes to the realization she loves him and can create her own fairytale ending if he is willing. As fast and snappy as all her other projects, she sets this plan in motion by asking him to rescue her as he once promised he would.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Flora gets a ride back to the farm from Pent-Hartigan and promises to dine with him soon. She changes into a tweed suit suitable for flying and packs her trunk to have it delivered to London the next day. She goes to the kitchen and finds all traces of the wedding reception have been cleaned away. Supper has been set up but none of the Starkadders are around, and Flora is rather glad of that. She sits quietly and through the door and can see Adam parading the cows to Hautcouture Farm. The little mop hangs from around his neck. Flora eats her supper, knowing soon she will be telling Charles about everything she did at the farm and wondering what he will think of it. She writes a letter of gratitude to Reuben and promises to visit soon. She adds a pound note with her thanks to Mrs. Beetle. She sets it on the table where everyone can see it, puts on her coat, and heads out into the field to await the plane. At almost eight, as the sky is darkening, she hears the steady roar of the plane. Charles hops out and Flora is overjoyed to see him. She hugs and kisses him with all her heart, to which he asks, "this is forever, isn't it?" Flora says yes. While Charles readies the plane, Flora tells him of her adventures on Cold Comfort Farm. Charles tells her how happy he is and can't believe it's true they are together. Flora assures him she loves him and they get into the plane. As they zoom off into the night sky, Flora knows that "tomorrow would be a beautiful day".

Chapter 23 Analysis

In the final chapter, Flora chooses to leave the farm without any fanfare, though reserves a great deal of self-satisfaction for her work. Her eye is now on the future. There is no indication her habits will change as she has had little character growth other than having gained a fondness and appreciation for her rural relatives. Charles does tell her he doesn't like meddling and won't allow it. She likes his bossy style as it offers her a sense of relief from self-imposed obligations. Flora's romantic departure is a spoof of sorts on the fairytale (or Hollywood) ending, unrealistically over the top, yet satisfying.



Characters

Flora Poste

Flora Poste is modeled after heroines of fiction, particularly of Jane Austen, who Flora compares herself to. She is nineteen and her parents have just died when the novel begins. Rather than work, she wants to find relatives she can live with. As she doesn't like things to be untidy, her goal is to tidy up any family messes she might find. Flora was not close to her parents and barely knows any of her relatives as she spent her childhood at boarding schools and most of her holidays with the family of her friend, Mary Smiling. She was forced to endure sports at school as it was her father's passion, but she did not care for them at all. She mentions she doesn't much care for people in general, yet over the course of the novel she expresses a lot of compassion for the Starkadder clan, the family members she chooses to live with. Cool, unflappable, and intellectual in the way she observes and pursues matters, Flora tackles each Starkadder family member's problems so that life can be tidy and organized without the pall of misery and gloom surrounding the farm. She seems to have an appreciation for the ridiculous oddities of rural living and broaches problems with humor and pragmatism. It is obvious she rather enjoys the challenges facing her. Like many Austen heroines, Flora is very bold and never shy to speak her mind, though always in a charming and tactful manner. She is not sentimental or emotional, even at the very end when she tells Charles she loves him. In fact, she abhors emotions, especially expressed in rows or moodiness. However, she is affectionate and shows this toward Elfine. She is upbeat, graceful, and positive, no matter how dire or dreadful as situation. She believes in civility and treats her guides, *The Higher Common Sense* and *Pensees*, as bibles for living and solving untidy crises. Interestingly, Flora does not go through much change or growth in the novel, essentially remaining consistent throughout. While reminiscent of Jane Austen's *Emma* for her meddling ways, Flora suffers no guilt over her interference in other people's lives; rather, she glories in it. The only real change is that she comes to appreciate the Starkadders as unique individuals, rather than preconceived archetypes.

Aunta Ada Doom

Aunt Ada Doom is the matriarch of the Starkadder clan. Mother to Judith Starkadder and grandmother to Reuben, Seth, and Elfine, she rules the family from the isolation of her room. She has not left her room for twenty years except to go downstairs twice a year for Counting, in which she sees which family members have died. She controls her family by giving them the smallest sums of money and by claiming to be mad. If they even talk of leaving, she has a "fit", thus they all feel compelled to stay on the farm. Aunt Ada claims she saw something nasty in a woodshed when she was two years old and this is what drove her to madness. It is never revealed what she saw. Her isolation and supposed madness casts a gloomy pall over the family and farm. Flora's arrival at the farm causes a lot of distress for Ada, especially as relatives start changing and leaving the farm. Flora sees through her convenient form of madness and Ada is unable to



control the events that Flora sets in motion. At the end of the novel, Flora spends a whole day with Aunt Ada, showing her through magazines, a Paris hotel brochure, and photos, that a lady of wealth can have a grand old time if she leaves her house. Aunt Ada shocks her family when she appears at Elfine's wedding reception in a flying outfit, bound for Paris. She is happy and grateful for Flora's influence but doesn't answer her questions about what wrong Amos did to her father and what her "rights" are that she had once mentioned in a postcard. With Aunt Ada's change, life at Cold Comfort Farm, even the structure itself, seems sunny and bright.

Elfine Starkadder

Tall with blue eyes, Elfine is Amos and Judith's only daughter, age seventeen. At the beginning of the novel, Elfine is like a woodland sprite, always running across the hills and writing poetry. She flits in and out of the house like a kingfisher, dressed in a cloak of green and her hair in a tangle. She is secretly in love with a local gentleman, Richard Hawk-Monitor, but he seems less than enthusiastic about her. When Flora finally manages to get Elfine in a conversation, she discovers Richard is having a twenty-first birthday party. Flora intercedes and spends three weeks before the party altering Elfine body and soul into a beautiful, presentable lady suitable for Richard. The scheme works and Richard proposes to Elfine. Their wedding day is the climax of the novel when all Flora's tidying efforts come to fruition.

Seth Starkadder

Seth is often described as having panther-like, animalistic qualities. Rugged and handsome, he is the epitome of manliness and women fawn all over him. However, women do not interest him that much. His real passion is the "talkies" and he knows every movie inside out and has card collections of many famous actresses, some signed. His passion is realized when Flora arranges for him to meet her American producer friend, Mr. Neck, who thinks Seth is just the star he's looking for and whisks him off to Hollywood for a glorious career. This devastates his mother Judith and grandmother Ada Doom as he was their pride and joy.

Reuben Starkadder

Reuben is Amos and Judith's oldest son. He loves the farm more than anyone else in the family but worries his father will never leave it to him. With Flora's help, he convinces Amos to go on a preaching tour so he can take care of the farm properly and show he is worth leaving it to. Reuben warms up to Flora and even speaks of marriage, but she says she would not make a good farm wife and suggests a farmhand's daughter, who will be the right age in a few years. By the end of the novel, Amos is so excited by his international preaching tour that he writes to say Reuben can have the farm.



Judith Starkadder

Judith is Flora's cousin and is married to Amos. She spends most of her days wallowing in misery, though she has a particular soft spot for her handsome son Seth, evidenced by two hundred photos of him in her bedroom. Her other children are Reuben and Elfine. She is a tall woman who typically wears a dark red shawl and her dark hair is often in disarray. Toward the end of the novel, Flora takes Judith to see a psychiatrist in London, who plans to give her an interest in European churches over six months of specialized care, then send her to Italy for a vacation.

Amos Starkadder

Amos is married to Judith and has three children—Reuben, Seth, and Elfine. Amos holds many grudges and refuses to leave the farm to his eldest son, instead intending to leave it to Adam. Amos typically dresses in black and wears a black hat. He is highly religious and preaches fiery sermons at the Church of the Quivering Brethren in Beershorn. He believes everyone is damned to hell, including his family. Although he would never admit it, he takes great pleasure in preaching and makes quite a performance of it. Thus, it is easy for Flora and Reuben to convince him he should be preaching to larger congregations. Amos finally takes their advice and goes on a tour which eventually takes him to the United States. By the end of the novel, he is so enraptured by his experiences that he leaves the farm to Reuben with no plans to return.

Adam Lambsbreath

Adam is an old farmhand at Cold Comfort Farm. Years of hard labor show in his gnarled hands and weathered face. He is particularly fond of the cows and also of Elfine Starkadder, who he refers to as his "liddle bird". One of his daily chores is to clean up after the men's breakfast. He washes the dishes with thorn twigs. When Flora buys him a proper mop, he thinks it is too beautiful to use on dirty dishes so hangs it in the cow shed instead. At the end of the novel, Adam gets permission to take the cows and live with Elfine and her new husband to help tend their livestock as well.

Mary Smiling

Mary Smiling appears predominantly at the beginning of the novel. She is an old school friend of Flora Poste. She is down to earth and practical and totally against Flora's idea of living with relatives. Mary, or Mrs. Smiling as she is more commonly referred to, has a fascination for brassieres and has amassed one of the largest collections in the world. She also manages to make many men of birth and fortune fall in love with her and her collection of about fifteen admirers are known as 'Mary's Pioneers-O'. Physically, she is described as a small twenty-six-year old Irish woman with a fair complexion and large grey eyes.



Charles Fairford

Charles Fairford is Flora Poste's second cousin and becomes the love of her life by the end of the novel, despite being a fairly minor character throughout. He is described as tall, dark, and serious. He is twenty-three years old and planning to be a parson. When Charles first hears of Flora's plan to live with relatives, he offers to rescue her in his plane if necessary. At the end of the novel, Flora calls him as her work is done on the farm. They admit their love to one another and fly off into the horizon.

Meriam Beetle

Meriam is the hired help at the farm and lives in a hut in Nettle Fitch Field. Every year for four years, she has birthed an illegitimate child like clockwork. No one is sure who the father is until the end, when the farmhand Urk is identified and decides to marry her. Meriam is sensual in an earthy and rather beastly way. She is shocked by Flora's advice on how to avoid pregnancies in the future, but ends up taking her advice.

Mrs. Beetle

Mrs. Beetle is Meriam's mother and is far more civilized in Flora's point of view. She is married to a man named Agony and plans to raise her grandchildren to be in a jazz band. To Flora's delight, Mrs. Beetle helps in the farm house while Meriam is laid up after birth.

Earl P. Neck

While watching the congregation of the Quivering Brethren, Flora recalls meeting Mr. Neck at a Japanese movie screening. He is a producer from Beverly Hills. He is married but has a lover, a rather tedious expectation he is required to endure for appearances. He appears toward the end of the story, invited to the farm by Flora. He is looking for a strapping young man to be the next big screen sensation. Per her plan, Flora introduces him to Seth. Mr. Neck is immediately taken by his rugged handsomeness and rushes him off to Hollywood.

Mr. Mybug

Mr. Mybug, whose real name is Meyerburg, is from London but is staying in Howling to write his book on Branwell Bronte, the Bronte brother he credits for being the real author of all his sisters' works, including *Wuthering Heights*. He is a slightly overweight intellectual who is obsessed with talking about sex. Flora does her best to avoid his advances, but all ends well when he marries a local spinster named Rennet.

Claud Hart-Harris

Claud Hart-Harris is Flora's young London friend who helps secure invitations to the Hawk-Monitor party and joins her as an escort.



Objects/Places

Cold Comfort Farm

The central location in the novel, Cold Comfort Farm is a dairy farm in Howling, Sussex that has been in the Starkadder family for generations. It begins as a dreary, forlorn, and rather sinister place, but after Flora's tidying up it becomes as cheery and blossoming as its inhabitants. The buildings are laid out in an octagonal shape, though not much of the original architecture exists due to many generations of royalty tearing down and rebuilding it to suit their whims.

Mouse Place

Mrs. Smiling's home in the Lambeth district of London where Flora initially goes to stay after her parents' funerals.

Nettle Fitch Field

A field by Cold Comfort Farm where the hired girl, Meriam, lives in a small hut.

Sukebind

A flowering plant that represents the dark nature of the farm. Any sukebind is removed from the house before Elfine's wedding.

Howling

The village closest to Cold Comfort Farm (about a mile away). Flora often walks to Howling to get away from the farm.

Condemn'd Man

Howling's only pub, where Mr. Mybug stays while writing his book.

Beershorn

A town seven miles from the farm where Flora first arrives by train and where Amos preaches at the Church of the Quivering Brethren.



London

The story begins in London and Flora frequents it a number of times in the novel, such as when she takes Elfine shopping for a ball gown, or takes Judith to lunch with the psychiatrist.

Pensees and The Higher Common Sense

Floras favorite books, by Abbe Fausse-Maigre, which are essentially guides for civilized living.

"Liddle Mop"

Flora gives Adam a little mop with a handle to use for cleaning dishes instead of a thorn twig. However, he thinks the mop is so beautiful he refuses to put his "liddle mop" in dirty water.

Gumboots

When Flora arrives at the farm and sees how dirty and mucky it is, she writes to her friend Mary Smiling asking to send gumboots.

Hautcouture Hall

Richard Hall-Monitor's family estate.

Ticklepenny's Field

A large field on the farm where planes can land. Toward the end of the novel, a plane lands to take Aunt Ada Doom to Paris, and Charles lands in his plane to take Flora back to London.



Themes

The Dominant Matriarch

Cold Comfort Farm makes fun of the "Dominant Grandmother Theme" which Flora recognizes is "found in all typical novels of agricultural life". Like the other characters, Aunt Ada Doom is presented in the extreme, claiming madness for something she saw in the woodshed when she was only two years old. She uses madness as an excuse to control her family and her "fits" intensify if they step out of line. With an iron fist over money and movements, Aunt Ada reigns from her tower, a second story bedroom from which she can watch the goings on. She recognizes her own power and finds her madness quite convenient for having her meals delivered to her room. Her stature is threatened when Flora Poste arrives and starts tidying up people's lives. Once Amos leaves the farm, the other family members gain strength and start perceiving Ada as human rather than god-like. As a result, they become braver and readier to move on with their lives and dreams. This leads to an inevitable showdown between Flora and Aunt Ada that is not described but left to the imagination when Flora spends the day in Ada's room. The result, it seems, is that Aunt Ada wanted to be rescued from her dreary existence as much as the next Starkadder and, given some good incentives, she's ready to fly the coop herself.

Nature and Sexuality

A major theme focuses on Nature and Sexuality, though presented in a satirical way mocking authors like D.H. Lawrence who pushed such connections to rather extreme limits. The hired girl, Meriam, embodies this theme as a sexual, promiscuous young woman who gets pregnant every spring like the creatures around her. Flora regards her as a ripe fruit and "a creature who was as close to the earth as a bloomy greengage and rather like one to look at and talk to. . ." Elfine is also a creature of nature but unlike the sensual Meriam, she is birdlike, flitting about like a hummingbird with plenty of romanticism felt but little eroticism. Mr. Mybug, who is obviously influenced by D.H. Lawrence and references him in dialogue, makes many comments on the connection between nature and sexuality, rather obsessively seeing sexual connotations all about him, such as buds reminding him of nipples and hills of breasts. Reuben, who loves the farm more than any person, feels passion for the soil and it is his love for it that fuels him. His brother Seth is like the bull in the barn, proud, sexual, and self-assured. Although not much interested in women, they are drawn to his animal-like magnetism.

Fish Out of Water

Flora Poste is the Fish Out of Water as a young, sophisticated urbanite in a rural country setting. As such themes often go, there is considerable friction and adjustment to the new life and, by the end, an appreciation for it. Flora goes wittingly to Cold



Comfort Farm, which is anything but comfortable and tidy, the way she likes things to be. Rather than adapt to the Starkadder ways, this fish changes their lives to suit her style of living, a variance on more common approaches to this theme. The family members think Flora's ways are rather bizarre and don't quite know what to make of her. But somehow they are all transformed in one way or another under Flora's hand and she takes pride in the success of her manipulations—success being conformity to her preferences of course. By the end of the story, she has a new appreciation of her relatives and they of her, but she chooses to return to London, feeling her work in the country is done. Despite the apparent success of Flora's handiwork, she has in fact broken up a large extended family and there is no resolution in how this affects them in the long term. As a parody, such complex dramatic understandings are not as important.

Pygmalion Theme

Like the George Bernard Shaw play, there is a strong Pygmalion theme in this novel. Flora is like Henry Higgins as she goes about transforming the Starkadders to suite her idea of civility. Like Higgins, she is blind to the possibility that her interference could lead to anything but positive outcomes. However, she doesn't ever question her actions and thrills in her conquests. Elfine is most closely like Eliza Doolittle as she is physically, socially, and emotionally changed and made to discard old habits such as writing poetry. The greatest transformation, with the least explanation, is on Aunt Ada Doom, who goes from being a crazy old lady in hiding to a cheerful adventurer flying off to Paris. It is the most unrealistic transformation but suits the story's whimsical style.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in third person voice except for certain portions with Aunt Ada Doom when it drifts into a first person voice, giving the reader a glimpse of the thoughts running through her mind. This first person voice is stylistically quite different than the rest of the prose in its staccato, rambling fashion. There is also small section (Chap. 7, p. 78) where the reader gets a first person perspective of Reuben's thoughts as he believes that Flora ("a woman. . . Blast! Blast!") has her intentions on the farm. The point of view is primarily from that of the main character, Flora Poste. The expression of the language describing characters and events are much like Flora would express them in voice. However, the point of view frequently shifts to other characters' perspectives for short sections and in situations where Flora is usually not present.

Setting

The novel begins in London, England, and Flora makes a number of excursions back to the city with various Starkadder family members. The main London setting is the home of Flora's friend, Mary Smiling. The house, at 1 Mouse Place, faces the Thames River in the Lambeth district. The primary setting for the novel is Cold Comfort Farm, a dairy farm in Sussex. The nearest village is Howling, a mile away, and the nearest train station is in the town of Beershorn, about seven miles away. Beershorn is also where Uncle Amos preaches at the Church of the Quivering Brethren. The buildings of Cold Comfort Farm are arranged in an octagonal fashion and the architecture has changed significantly over time as different royals changed the farm to suit their whims. At the beginning of the story, the farm is a dreary, dirty, dismal place and by the end it is clean, bright, and welcoming. There are a number of important settings on the farm. Nettle Flitch Field is where Meriam, the hired girl, lives in a small hut. Flora visits it after Meriam has just had her fourth child to ask about having her curtains clean. Flora spends quite a bit of time in her bedroom, which has a fireplace, long crimson curtains (etc.) Flora also has a small parlour where she visits with guests, such as Mr. Mybug and Mr. Neck. The kitchen is the most prevalent room in the farmhouse, as it is where Flora tends to see most of the family members. It is often a mess, especially after Adam has cooked the porridge. The kitchen is also the room that Aunt Ada Doom comes to twice a year to do the Counting. Aunt Ada's room is often referred to in the book. Flora views it as a "tower" for the mad grandmother. The window looks out over the front of the house, eyes often peering out to see what is going on. The dairy shed is also a frequently referenced setting and where Adam spends all the time he can with the cows, who he adores.



Language and Meaning

Cold Comfort Farm is well known as a parody of literature by authors such as Mary Webb, Jane Austen, the Bronte Sisters, D.H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy, and others. It essentially mocks turn-of-the-century "agricultural" literature that focused on earthy, rural settings with sexually strong themes and prose. There are a number of references to Austen and the Bronte sisters, wittily woven in with Mr. Mybug's character as he tries to prove the Bronte literature was actually written by a besotted brother. In general, Mr. Mybug seems to aspire to a D.H. Lawrence style (he mentions the author), especially with his obsession with sexuality in nature. Flora also points out that there is always a Dominant Grandmother Theme in agricultural literature. The language is charming and witty in its farcical descriptions of persons or events. These descriptions are often over the top, poking fun at excessively dramatic literary forms. The unflappable heroine has a cool, pragmatic, and witty view on life, and this is evident when witnessing things from her perspective, such as Flora's reference to the Tortured Dumb Beast manner when visiting the hired girl, Meriam. All the characters are given distinctive oddities that parody literary archetypes. At the same time, they have a depth that defies some of their stereotype and are very likable, even tortured souls like Aunt Ada Doom.

Structure

Cold Comfort Farm, a 233 page novel, is comprised of twenty-two chapters of approximately equal length, typically eight to ten pages each. The forward consists of a letter written by the author, Stella Gibbons, to fictitious author Anthony Pookworthy, describing her career as a journalist and how she came about writing Cold Comfort Farm. She also mentions she is indicating finer passages with one, two, or three stars, which appear throughout the book as asterisks. This forward, like the rest of the book, is a parody of more serious literary works. The first two chapters in the novel take place in London as Flora, the central character, writes to family members to see which ones she wants most to live with. These chapters give background information on Flora and help establish her unique character and traits as well as the tone of the book. In chapter three, the point of view shifts to the Cold Comfort Farm family and the workhands just prior to Flora's arrival. Except for a few London excursions, the remainder of the book is focused on events at Cold Comfort Farm. There is a straightforward plot structure. Flora's goal is to tidy up the farm, so she tackles each family member one at a time, building to a climax in which Flora must confront the family matriarch, Aunt Ada Doom, if she is to succeed. This showdown takes place in chapter twenty. The remaining three chapters resolve the story with the apex of Elfine's wedding, when Aunt Ada presents herself to the family with the significant changes influenced by Flora. In the final chapter, Flora has achieved her goal and has a happy, romantic ending, taking off in a plane to start a life with the man she loves.



Quotes

"I am only nineteen, but I have already observed that, whereas there still lingers some absurd prejudice against living on one's friends, no limits are set, either by society or by one's own conscience, to the amount one may impose upon one's relatives." Chap. 1, p. 13

"On the whole, I dislike my fellow-beings; I find them so difficult to understand. But I have a tidy mind, and untidy lives irritate me. Also, they are uncivilized." Chap. 2, p. 20

"She was feeling downright morbid, and her sensations were unpleasingly complicated by the knowledge that it was entirely due to her own obstinacy that she was setting out at all upon this absurd and disagreeable pilgrimage." Chap. 2, p. 29

"A strong family likeness wavered in and out of the fierce, earth-reddened faces of the seven, like a capricious light." Chap. 3, p. 39

"It then occurred to her that there was a less frivolous cause for the silence which had fallen, and for the steady regard with which her cousin confronted her. So, Flora mused, must Columbus have felt when the poor Indian fixed his solemn, unwavering gaze upon the great sailor's face. For the first time, a Starkadder looked upon a civilized being." Chap. 4, p. 49

"There have always been Starkadders at Cold Comfort. 'Tis impossible for any on us to dream o' leavin' here. There's reasons why we can't. Mrs. Starkadder, she's sot on us stayin' here. 'Tis her life, 'tes the life in her veins." Chap. 5, p. 56

"Persons of Aunt Ada's temperament were not fond of a tidy life. Storms were what they liked; plenty of rows, and doors being slammed, and jaws sticking out, and faces white with fury, and faces brooding in corners, and faces making unnecessary fuss at breakfast, and plenty of opportunities for gorgeous emotional wallowings, and partings for ever, and misunderstandings, and interferings, and spyings, and, above all, managng and intriguing. Oh, they did enjoy themselves!" Chap. 5, p. 57

"The hired girl huddled closer over the oil stove, looking at Flora in what the latter interestedly recognized as the Tortured Dumb Beast manner." Chap. 6, p. 69

"Had she not enough to do at Cold Comfort without there being a genius named Mybug staying a mile away from the farm who would probably fall in love with her?" Chap. 7, p. 76



"You must be prepared, I think, to sin in order to save others - at least, that is what I should be prepared to do if I were going round the country preaching from a Ford van." Chap. 8, p. 91

"Only a person with a candid mind, who is usually bored by intrigues, can appreciate the full fun of an intrigue when they begin to manage one for the first time. If there are several intrigues and there is a certain danger of their getting mixed up and spoiling each other, the enjoyment is even keener." Chap. 10, p. 109

"And seeing that it was because of that incident that you sat here ruling the roost and having five meals a day brought up to you as regularly as clockwork, it hadn't been such a bad break for you, that day you saw something nasty in the woodshed." Chap. 10, p. 115

"You would expect, by all the laws of probability, to find a mad grandmother at Cold Comfort Farm, and for once the laws of probability had not done you down and a mad grandmother there was." Chap. 11, p. 119

"If she succeeded in making Dick Hawk-Monitor propose to Elfine it would be a successful gaste in the face of the Starkadders. It would be a triumph of the Higher Common Sense over Aunt Ada Doom." Chap. 12, p. 134

"She had made Elfine look groomed and normal, yet had preserved in her personality a suggestion of cool, smoothly-blowing winds and of pine-trees and the smell of wild flowers." Chap. 13, p. 146

"The intelligent and sensitive reader will doubtless have wondered at intervals throughout the narrative as to how Flora managed without a bathroom." Chap. 13, p. 148

"So that's a sukebind, is it? I suppose when it opens all the trouble begins?" Chap. 13, p. 149

"What else but a staircase could so perfectly set off the jewel she had made of Elfine?" Chap. 15, p. 156

"Gay voices rose every second above the roar of the general conversation like individual trills of water from the rush of a stream in spate. A laughing mouth, three youthful heads gathered together, while a fourth, distorted with laughter, uttered gasping



protests; chins lifted and eyes narrowed between lashes with mirth; an azalea plant revealed as two persons drew back from the table to shout with laughter: such were the outward signs of a Good Party. And above them floated this invisible glittering cloud of success." Chap. 14, p. 161

"Her aim was achieved. She felt as though she had shaken her fist in the face of Aunt Ada Doom." Chap. 15, p. 163

"I saw something nasty in the woodshed." Chap. 16, p. 171

"He looked exactly what he was, the local sexually successful bounder." Chap. 17, p. 184

"She watched the car drive away. It was going to Cloud Cuckoo Land; it was going to the Kingdom of Cockaigne; it was going to Hollywood. Seth would never have a chance, now, of becoming a nice, normal young man. He would become a world-famous swollen mask." Chap. 18, p. 187

"There they were, all living like fighting cocks; and wherever Flora went she seemed to stumble over hen-faced female Starkadders in cotton dresses." Chap. 19, p. 198

"The farmhouse no longer looked like a beast about to spring." Chap. 20, p. 203

"As Nancy ran off through the clear summer twilight, Flora reverently shut the covers of 'The Higher Common Sense'. She needed it no longer." Chap. 20, p. 207

"There they all were. Enjoying themselves. Having a nice time. And having it in an ordinary human manner. Not having it because they were raping somebody, or beating somebody, or having religious mania or being doomed to silence by a gloomy, earthy pride, or loving the soil with the fierce desire of a lecher, or anything of that sort." Chap. 21, p. 217

"We've had a wedding here today, and I've tidied everything up. I mean, there's nothing left for me to do here." Chap. 22, p. 228

"Like all really strong-minded women, on whom everybody flops, she adored being bossed about. It was so restful." Chap. 23, p. 232

Topics for Discussion

What is the author trying to achieve with her parody of rural country life?

In what ways is nature used to typify characters such as Seth, Meriam, and Elfine?

Why do you think the author chose to give her heroine, Flora Poste, the least growth or change compared to the other characters in the novel?

How does the descriptive language add to humor and satire?

Sukebind is a recurring motif. When does it appear in the novel and what does it seem to represent in those instances?

How does gender play a part in terms of power, control, and traditional roles?

In what ways are the main characters stereotypical and in what ways do they break their archetypes?

Several "secrets" remain unanswered by the end of the novel, such as what Aunt Ada saw in the woodshed and what Flora's rights were based on an incident between her father and Amos. Why do you think the author chose not to reveal them versus satisfy the reader's curiosity?