

# **Cold Sassy Tree Study Guide**

**Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Ann Burns**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Cold Sassy Tree Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter One - Two.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Three.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Four.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Five - Six.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Seven - Eight.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Nine.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Ten - Eleven.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twelve - Fourteen.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Fourteen - Sixteen.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Nineteen - Twenty.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-one - Twenty-two.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-three - Twenty-four.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-seven - Twenty-eight.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-nine.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirty - Thirty-one.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirty-two.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-five.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirty-six - Thirty-seven.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Thirty-eight - Thirty-nine.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Forty.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>



[Chapter Forty-one..... 30](#)

[Chapter Forty-two - Forty-three..... 32](#)

[Chapter Forty-four - Forty-five..... 34](#)

[Chapter Forty-six - Forty-seven..... 36](#)

[Chapter Forty-eight - Forty-nine..... 37](#)

[Chapter Fifty..... 38](#)

[Characters..... 40](#)

[Objects/Places..... 43](#)

[Social Sensitivity..... 45](#)

[Techniques..... 47](#)

[Themes..... 48](#)

[Style..... 52](#)

[Quotes..... 54](#)

[Adaptations..... 56](#)

[Key Questions..... 57](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 59](#)

[Literary Precedents..... 60](#)

[Related Titles..... 61](#)

[Copyright Information..... 62](#)



## Plot Summary

Cold Sassy Tree, set in post civil war, Georgia, is about a family that is undergoing a rapid transformation. Told from fourteen-year-old Will's point of view, the story uncovers a family and a small town's reactions to the death of a grandmother and the quick remarriage of the widowed grandfather.

Cold Sassy is the name of the town where Will Tweedy resides. Will's Granny Blakeslee passed away three weeks ago. The whole family is in mourning. This means wearing black dresses for the women and mourning armbands for the men. It means no fishing, reading the comics, or in general, partaking of fun activities. The period of mourning typically lasts a full year. Three weeks into the mourning period, Grandpa Blakeslee gets remarried.

The town of Cold Sassy and the family are shocked at the impropriety of what Grandpa Blakeslee has done. He has married the Milliner, Love Simpson. Grandpa Blakeslee has wanted Miss Love ever since he hired her to make hats in his store in town. He loved his wife deeply, but the romantic side of his marriage had long been dead. When he becomes single, he doesn't feel he can wait the proper amount of time without someone claiming Love.

Grandpa Blakeslee has only one arm. He has never done "women's work" in his life. After his wife passes away, neighbors and his two daughters help care for him. Using this as an excuse, Grandpa Blakeslee asks Love to marry him as a business proposal. If she will take care of him and the house, he will deed the house and everything in it to her.

Love Simpson has given up on love. Once engaged, she was rejected due to the fact that her father had sexually abused her. When Mr. Blakeslee offers her a house, she sees the chance, not only for a house, but for a family as well. It is an offer she accepts.

Love Simpson has been liked by almost all Cold Sassy since she arrived there. Will notes that people like her for various reasons. The men like her because she is pretty and nice. The women like her because she is nice and helps them with fashion. The Methodists like her because she plays the piano well. The only one in town who doesn't like her is Will's Aunt Loma, who is jealous of her.

After Love and Grandpa Blakeslee marry, most of the town shuns her. They see her as greedy, stealing another's man and house. Grandpa Blakeslee's two daughters hate her most of all. They feel she is shaming the family and stealing their inheritance. Will is one of few who still likes her.

Throughout this story, the reader will see how Will deals with the constant strain within the family. He is also dealing with other issues of the process of growing up. Added to these issues are those facing the United States during this time. New inventions, such as electricity, telephones, indoor plumbing and automobiles are all having an impact on

the small town. Issues such as discord among race, the North and the South, and the poor and the wealthy, and different religious views are all major factors as Will comes to terms with his evolving role in life.



# Chapter One - Two

## Chapter One - Two Summary

Cold Sassy Tree, set in post civil war, Georgia, is about a family that is undergoing a rapid transformation. Told from fourteen-year-old Will's point of view, the story will uncover a family and a small town's reactions to the death of a grandmother and the quick remarriage of the widowed grandfather.

Grandpa Blakeslee sends his grandson, Will Tweedy, to get his mother, Mary Willis and Aunt Loma, so he can tell them all some news. Things in the family have not been the same since Granny Blakeslee died. Grandpa Blakeslee announces that he is getting married to Love Simpson, who is the milliner in his store. Grandpa Blakeslee is lonesome and needs someone to help take care of him.

The ladies are worried about what people will think. Love Simpson is too young; she is a Yankee, and worst of all, Granny Blakeslee has only been dead for three weeks. People will think that he didn't love Granny, or that he had had his sights on Miss Love all along. The ladies are also worried that they are losing their inheritance to Miss Love.

## Chapter One - Two Analysis

Will's grandmother's death is the event that triggers much chaos in Will's life. After her death, Grandpa Blakeslee is left lonely and in need of help. Grandpa Blakeslee has just one arm, so tasks that would otherwise come easy are made difficult.

It is later revealed to the reader and Will that Grandpa Blakeslee has wanted Love Simpson, since she first came to work for him. He never acts on this until he asks her to marry him. Even then, he tells her it is a marriage in name only.

When Grandpa Blakeslee makes the decision to get married, he goes against the general guidelines of what is acceptable in Cold Sassy, Georgia in 1906. Widows and widowers were expected to be in mourning for their deceased spouses for at least one year after their death. This meant not only wearing mourning clothes, but refraining from activities generally considered fun and definitely not remarrying. Waiting not one year, but three weeks, is shocking and disrespectful in the opinion of the people of Cold Sassy.

Another problem with the marriage is Love Simpson's age compared to his. Simpson is in her mid-thirties and Grandpa is fifty-nine. Many will later speculate that Simpson only married him to get his possessions. Grandpa Blakeslee owns the local store. It is later revealed to them and the reader, that this is partially the case. Grandpa Blakeslee offers Miss Love the house if she will marry him.



# Chapter Three

## Chapter Three Summary

Will doesn't understand why his mother and Aunt Loma aren't happy that Grandpa Blakeslee is getting married. Grandpa Blakeslee needs someone to look after him, so his engagement is a good thing.

Will hates being in mourning. This entails refraining from "fun" activities such as fishing, reading the funny page in the newspaper and camping. Will's father, Hoyt, arrives home to tell Mary that her father has left in his buggy with Miss Love to go to Jefferson to get married. Will listens quietly to their conversation, as Mary confides her fears to his father.

Mary also compares her father to Loma. Loma had wanted to become an actress, but Grandpa Blakeslee wouldn't let her. To spite her father, Loma married Campbell Williams instead. Loma and her father still don't talk to each other a lot because of it.

## Chapter Three Analysis

Grandpa Blakeslee is an authoritative figure. Even when others don't like what he is telling them to do, they generally do it. For example, Granny Blakeslee doesn't allow him to keep liquor in the house. Will's parents don't like it either, but they still allow him to keep his liquor in their house, so every morning Grandpa Blakeslee comes over for his morning drink.

This obedience to Grandpa Blakeslee can be attributed to several factors. Mary Willis is scared of her father and naturally wants to keep him happy. Another driving factor for the family is that Grandpa Blakeslee employs Uncle Camp, Aunt Loma's husband, as well as Will's father, Hoyt. Grandpa Blakeslee's personality is the biggest contributing factor to his ability to command. He is used to getting his way and doesn't leave room for anyone to say no to him. People naturally listen to what he has to say.



# Chapter Four

## Chapter Four Summary

Grandpa Blakeslee has only two daughters who lived. Will is special because he is the first grandson. Grandpa Blakeslee wants Will to work in the store for a part interest one day, although Will would rather be a farmer.

Love Simpson comes from Baltimore, has never married, dresses fashionably and acts lively. Miss Love is liked by most before she marries Mr. Blakeslee. The women like her because she is good with fashion. The men like her because she is pretty and has a good personality and the Methodists like her because she plays the piano well. Supposedly, Love's ex-fiance got Love's best friend pregnant, and they married instead. Also, against her credit in town, is the rumor that Love's father belongs to the union army.

## Chapter Four Analysis

Chapter four provides background for the reader. It establishes that at the point that Miss Love comes into town, most of Cold Sassy likes her for one reason or another. As soon as she marries Mr. Blakeslee, however, she is shunned.

Miss Love is a very private person. The only insights into her life before Cold Sassy come second hand. This causes much unfair speculation. Miss Love is part of the suffrage movement, which hasn't really caught on in Cold Sassy, but hasn't made her an outcast, either.





# Chapter Five - Six

## Chapter Five - Six Summary

Granny Blakeslee had a stroke. Will remembers watching his grandfather cry in a way that he has never before seen a grown man cry. Granny Blakeslee does not recover, but does get a little better for a short period of time. She wakes and tells Mr. Blakeslee that he needs a haircut. Mr. Blakeslee does most of the talking, since Mrs. Blakeslee can't speak very well. Then she drifts off to sleep. Mr. Blakeslee isn't as religious as Hoyt, but he tells Will that it is time for them to pray. During this prayer, Grandpa says that he would be thankful if God would spare his wife, but won't blame him by saying that it was his will if he doesn't.

The next morning, Mattie Lou is better. Will thinks that if people would bother to remember that day, they would know that Miss Love meant nothing to him at that time.

## Chapter Five - Six Analysis

The reader and Will will later learn that what Mr. Blakeslee is asking forgiveness for is exactly what the town thinks. Mr. Blakeslee hasn't made any move toward Miss Love, and hasn't let on to anyone, but he has wanted her since she first arrived in town.

Mrs. Blakeslee had a lot of problems in childbirth. After the last child, they are told that another pregnancy will kill her. Consequently, the romantic side of their relationship dies, and they become more like friends than husband and wife.

When Mr. Blakeslee hires Miss Love, she stays with them until she can find a room in town to rent. Miss Love and Mrs. Blakeslee like each other a lot and neither suspects that Mr. Blakeslee is imagining what it might be like to be married to Miss Love. Guilt begins to eat at Mr. Blakeslee. Mrs. Blakeslee is in tune to the fact that something is wrong, but she never guesses what and he never tells.



# Chapter Seven - Eight

## Chapter Seven - Eight Summary

When people come to call after Granny's death, Love Simpson is there to help.

Grandpa Blakeslee had Will come over early the morning after the wake. They spend much of the day weaving roses into cloth because Granny had once said that she "wouldn't mind dying if she could be buried in a bed of roses," so Grandpa does just that. He and Will nail the rose covered cloths to the grave walls and floor.

Remembering this act of caring, Will is certain that his grandfather loved his grandmother, regardless of the fact that he knows his grandfather wanted Love before his Granny was dead.

Will is sad not only for Granny and Grandpa Blakeslee, but also for his best friend, Bluford Jackson.

## Chapter Seven - Eight Analysis

One superstition that some in Cold Sassy have is that you can tell when a sick person is about to pass away by they way that they pick at the covers. Granny Blakeslee is doing just that as she is telling about the angels in her sick room. That night, she passes, reinforcing this belief.

Grandpa Blakeslee is consumed with grief for his wife and guilt for wanting another woman. No one knows about his want for Miss Love, but it bothers him.

Many in town believe that Grandpa Blakeslee never looked twice at Miss Love, but that she had designs on Grandpa the whole time. Will will later learn that it was in fact the other way around.

Love is also upset about Granny's passing. The first year she was there, she had gotten the flu, and Granny bathed her every morning. Now she is repaying the kindness as much as she can.

It is the custom for family to stay up all night (a wake) with the dead. Grandpa Blakeslee won't let anyone stay. He says that he is going to be the one to stay up with her, no one else.



# Chapter Nine

## Chapter Nine Summary

About a week after Granny's funeral, Will goes to Grandpa Blakeslee's house. Granny had never been much of a housekeeper, but she kept her house mostly neat. Now the house is in horrible shape. Will spends the morning cleaning it up, then sits on the step and cries for his Granny.

Will thinks as he is cleaning house, that his Granny would've hated dying in such a plain way. She always told stories about people who died or were considered dead, like those who have a grave because their families considered them dead because of something they did, or like Will's Grandmother who "died twice." After thinking about it for sometime, Will decides that maybe she didn't die so plain after all. Will feels that even she would find it notable that Grandpa Blakeslee remarried in only three weeks.

## Chapter Nine Analysis

The family Bible is used for record keeping. Putting Granny Blakeslee's death in it is a kind of finality. Later, it will enrage Mary Willis when Love Simpson writes Grandpa's remarriage to her in it.

Will notes that to mourn isn't the same as to be in mourning. He was mourning when he cried for his Granny. He is in mourning when he is wearing his armband and missing out on fun. Will detests being in mourning.



# Chapter Ten - Eleven

## Chapter Ten - Eleven Summary

Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love Simpson get married. It dawns on Will that his time of mourning must be about over if his grandfather could get remarried.

Will heads out to go fishing with his dog, T.R. Will thinks about a girl named Lightfoot McLendon. She is a mill girl he knows from school. Will has a crush on her, and the thought of seeing her prompts him to want to walk through mill town.

Will makes it through mill town and to the fishing spot. He isn't having much luck when he happens to look up at the trestle over the creek. He decides to walk across them, though T.R. is too scared to follow.

## Chapter Ten - Eleven Analysis

The civil war has caused a deeply-rooted hatred for the North among the people of Cold Sassy. The fourth of July parade illustrates some of this feeling.

Will decides to go fishing and even to go through Mill Town by himself. He eventually feels guilty about it. He knows that he should be home working in the garden; he is just so tired of being in mourning for his Granny, that those feelings overcome his sense of duty to his family.

Halfway through Mill Town, he begins hoping that he doesn't see Lightfoot. What if he sees lint in her hair or her rundown house? Would he still be able to look at her the same way?

Lightfoot has come to Cold Sassy with her father. They are staying with her late mother's sister. They have come so Lightfoot can get an education and make something of herself. Will notes that she doesn't seem to realize that no one in mill town has ever made anything of themselves. He is right, except for the fact that Grandpa Blakeslee will later give her husband a job in his store.



# Chapter Twelve - Fourteen

## Chapter Twelve - Fourteen Summary

Will stretches out on his belly to watch the water through the trestles. Will thinks that T.R. acts like he hears the train, but it couldn't be time. He puts his ear to the trestle, and sure enough, he can hear it, too. Just in time, Will decides to fall.

Falling works. He is partially deafened due to the noise, and burned from the hot cinders, but he is alive. The train comes to a stop about a hundred yards away. T.R. immediately runs onto the trestle to Will, and Lightfoot McLendon appears to help Will off the trestle.

Will realizes that Lightfoot is crying. She tells him that she left her almost-full bucket in the berry patch. Will knows that this was probably to be supper but doesn't let her know that he knows that. He tells her that he will go berry picking with her the next day.

Loomis helps Will off the train to a crowd of people congratulating Will and even giving him money.

When Will gets home, he expects to be in trouble. Many come to see the boy that was run over by a train and is alive to tell it.

## Chapter Twelve - Fourteen Analysis

Will tries not to do anything that would let Lightfoot know that he knows how poor her family is. He feels guilty that he has plenty to eat and she doesn't.

Will attains something just short of celebrity status for a time after his near-death experience. He is the only one that anyone can remember who got ran over by a train and lived to tell about it. Will usually loves to be in the spotlight. This time he is too shook up to really enjoy it.



## Chapter Fourteen - Sixteen

### Chapter Fourteen - Sixteen Summary

Most people in Cold Sassy attribute Will's survival to the fact that it just wasn't his time. Grandpa puts on a show and announces to the crowd that he and Miss Love have gotten married. Mary Willis then tells Grandpa about Will's close call with the train.

Grandpa Blakeslee and Will go into the kitchen for a piece of pie and a talk. Will asks Grandpa Blakeslee if he is still alive because it is God's will, if God gave him the idea to fall, and what the Bible means where it says that you will get what you ask for. Grandpa tells him that he is alive because he had the good sense to fall. Grandpa Blakeslee wants Will to understand that God's will has to do with the good things in life, not just death and disappointment.

Grandpa Blakeslee asks the crowd to join them in prayer and blesses the memory of his late wife. He also asks a blessing for Miss Love and asks that she understand that anything good in him is because of Mattie Lou. He asks that the Lord bless Will also.

### Chapter Fourteen - Sixteen Analysis

Will has a lot of questions about God and death, and his brush with death makes them a little more important. Grandpa Blakeslee doesn't follow the exact same set of beliefs that Hoyt does, and Will knows that Hoyt would be angry if he heard Grandpa's beliefs. Will questions his grandpa anyway, because too much of his own beliefs don't make sense to him.

Grandpa shocks the crowd with his mentioning Mattie Lou, but the prayer seems to make some feel a little better. Grandpa makes it clear in his prayer that he loves his late wife and is not trying to replace her, but he needs help. While this eases feelings a little, it doesn't slow the gossip down one bit. Will notes that he thinks that people will be talking about him instead of Grandpa and Miss Love now, but he is wrong.



# Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen

## Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen Summary

Will forgets all about his promise to meet Lightfoot the next day. His day is filled with people asking about his experience with the train and about Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love's marriage.

Grandpa Blakeslee shows up two days later and tells Mary Willis that she and Loma need to go to the house and go through their mother's things. Grandpa Blakeslee tells her to send Will as soon as he gets done. When Will gets to Grandpa Blakeslee's house, he is greeted with lively piano music. Love puts Will to work helping her get the house clean. Will is a little offended that Miss Love wants to change so much about the house.

When Grandpa Blakeslee arrives home to find no supper cooked. Will is expecting a big scene when Love tells him that she lost track of time, but none follows.

Miss Love mentions to Grandpa Blakeslee that she would like to give him a shave and a haircut. After Will tells him that folks won't recognize him without the beard, the fun in that prospect convinces him.

## Chapter Seventeen - Eighteen Analysis

Most in Cold Sassy hold the belief that you shouldn't let sunlight touch your furniture or it will fade it. Many can not believe that Miss Love is willing to risk letting the things that Mattie Lou left become faded. People also take offense to Miss Love's cleaning spree. They feel that she is saying by her actions that Mattie Lou was a poor housekeeper, although it is admitted that she was.

While Will is cleaning, he finds the family Bible. Looking inside it, he sees that Miss Love has written in her marriage to Grandpa Blakeslee. Will grasps right away that his mother will be mad about the family Bible. It is a Toy family bible, not a Blakeslee family Bible.

Will mentions that he is glad that Miss Love gives Grandpa Blakeslee the shave when she does, especially when Mr. McAllister shows up later that day.



# Chapter Nineteen - Twenty

## Chapter Nineteen - Twenty Summary

Will and Miss Love rearrange furniture and Will asks why she married Grandpa Blakeslee. She tells him that she did it for the house and its belongings, two-hundred dollars, and to belong to a family. She tells him that she didn't think it was fitting to marry so soon, but Grandpa Blakeslee said he was going to marry another woman if she said no.

Miss Love talks to Will for a while longer, telling him that she missed out on love, but she would settle for a man she respected with a family she was proud to be part of, like Grandpa Blakeslee.

About that time, Will sees a well-dressed stranger outside. He is holding a fancy saddle and walking toward the house.

## Chapter Nineteen - Twenty Analysis

Grandpa Blakeslee goes easy on Miss Love for not having a big lunch on the table. He also lets her shave off his beard, even though he doesn't like shaving. These are two of the many changes Miss Love will talk Grandpa Blakeslee into making.

Miss Love reveals that Grandpa Blakeslee has said he is tired of going to church. The people at church never talk about the good side of religion, and he doesn't want to go anymore. He only went before to make Mattie Lou happy, but he doesn't intend to do that anymore.

It is ironic that Mr. McAllister arrives at the house just as Miss Love gets done telling Will she has missed out on love. Love Simpson was engaged to Mr. McAllister, and though he hurt her badly, she is still in love with him.





# Chapter Twenty-one - Twenty-two

## Chapter Twenty-one - Twenty-two Summary

When Mr. McAllister walks to the house, Love tells Will not to let him in. It is too late, though, as he is already pushing his way through the door.

Love seems to have forgotten her surroundings, and she and the stranger share passionate kisses as Will watches on. Will, worried that Grandpa Blakeslee might come home, glances through the door and sees Grandpa's gossip-loving neighbor, Miss. Effie Belle heading toward the house. Will tries to intercede and keep Miss Effie Belle from seeing. Just as he suspects, she did see the kisses and hurries to tell the other residents of Cold Sassy.

Love comes to her senses and tells McAllister to leave. He has brought her the saddle that was her engagement present before, and he wants her to marry him. About that time, Grandpa Blakeslee comes into the house.

The two men talk for a while until McAllister returns to the depot. When he is gone, Love tells him why McAllister was there. Grandpa, realizing that Love is still in love with McAllister, offers to get an annulment so she can marry him. Love thinks about it, but tells Grandpa that she wouldn't marry McAllister even if she wasn't married to Grandpa Blakeslee.

## Chapter Twenty-one - Twenty-two Analysis

Will shows loyalty to Miss Love throughout this scene. Miss Love has been married to Grandpa Blakeslee for only two days. Now Will witnesses her kissing Mr. McAllister very passionately. Will takes up for her and keeps this secret. It doesn't do much good, keeping the secret since Miss Effie Belle also saw and is not loyal to Miss Love.

Will is glad that Grandpa Blakeslee has gotten a haircut and a shave. He feels as though Miss Love now has a presentable husband that she can be proud of, rather than an old man.

Aunt Loma has told Cold Sassy that Mr. McAllister left Miss Love to run off with her best friend. Will finds out that that was a lie as he listens to their conversation. Not much makes sense at this point in time, but he later learns that Miss Love confided in McAllister that she was raped by her father. McAllister writes her a letter telling her that the wedding is off and asking for the ring back. Now McAllister is sorry for this course of action and wants to marry her after all.



# Chapter Twenty-three - Twenty-four

## Chapter Twenty-three - Twenty-four Summary

Grandpa says that Love should keep the saddle, even though they have no horses. Then Grandpa remembers that he has a cousin who offered him a racehorse for free. Love is excited about the prospect of getting a horse. Grandpa asks Will if he will go and get the horse and bring it back.

Will is now excited. He asks if he could take Grandpa Tweedy's covered wagon and make a camping trip out of it. Grandpa says it is fine with him if Grandpa Tweedy will let him have the wagon.

Will goes back to Grandpa Blakeslee's house that night. He tells Love that he will take up for her and tell people that Miss Effie Belle is lying if she did see anything. Love tells him that he should stay out of it, that it is for grown-ups.

Miss Effie Belle begins spreading the news of Miss Love's kiss before Sunday school the next morning.

## Chapter Twenty-three - Twenty-four Analysis

Grandpa confides in Will that he is only going to get the horse because Miss Love needs a distraction to take her mind off Mr. McAllister. He is sure that there is a lot wrong with the horse and hopes that Miss Love is as good with horses as she says she is.

Will finds himself daydreaming about Miss Love. He imagines what it would be like to kiss her the way Mr. McAllister kissed her. When she tells him that the matter at hand is for grown folks, he feels cut down, but when she pecks him on the cheek, he is elated.

Miss Effie Belle and most of the rest of the Methodist congregation show just how hypocritical they can be. They use the Sunday morning worship service to make Miss Love feel as badly as possible, and it works. They also look down on her for wearing black as if she was in mourning, but as Mary Willis points out, it would look worse for her to wear red. No matter what she does at this point, it's wrong.



## Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six

### Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six Summary

Pink, Will, Dunson, Lee Roy and Smiley head off on their camping trip in the mountains. They are having a great time, until that night when they watch two black bears demolish their food box.

The rest of the trip is miserable. It is rainy and cold; the boys are scared to sleep in a wagon that hauls dead bodies, and they are hungry, too. They do a little hunting, but then one of the boys leaves the shells out in the rain. Now their meals will have to consist of berries.

The boys decide to cut the camping trip short and get the racehorse.

### Chapter Twenty-five - Twenty-six Analysis

Will doesn't intend on going into business with Grandpa Blakeslee, but Grandpa Blakeslee doesn't realize that. Most in this era would love to have an opportunity like Will will be handed in the store. Will wants to make his own future, though.



# Chapter Twenty-seven - Twenty-eight

## Chapter Twenty-seven - Twenty-eight Summary

The Methodists have sent a committee to Miss Love to tell her that she is no longer to play at the service anymore. Grandpa Blakeslee then tells Will that he and Miss Love held church in his house that morning. He was the preacher and she was the piano player. Grandpa says that Love then got a newspaper clipping about fallen women in the mail. She was going to go to church, anyway, but she was so upset and mad, that Grandpa convinced her that it would be better to stay home and have service there.

In an attempt to get Will to stop taking up for Miss Love, Mary Willis tells Will what Miss Love said in the store after the committee spoke to her. Miss Love announced in the store that day that she was not going to use the name "Mrs. Blakeslee." Of course, it is her legal title, but she would prefer to be addressed as usual. Grandpa Blakeslee is surprised, but doesn't seem upset.

Then, Mrs. Predmore walks up and tells Grandpa what she thinks of him and Miss Love marrying so soon after Mattie Lou's death. This makes Grandpa mad, and he tells her to shut up, but then Love informs her that they are married in name only. This makes Grandpa furious. Love doesn't stop. She tells Mrs. Predmore everything, including that she married him for the house.

Grandpa Blakeslee had been furious, but finally starts laughing. He says that he never wants her mad at him.

## Chapter Twenty-seven - Twenty-eight Analysis

Mary Willis wants Will to show loyalty to her, rather than to Miss Love. She is trying everything she can to make Will hate Miss Love as much as Mary Willis does.

Grandpa Blakeslee doesn't mind gossip as much as Love does; however, he is mad at Miss Love for telling the reason they married. A reason for this may be that he intends to change the course of their relationship.

Miss Love is being torn apart by the town no matter what she does. One day she is criticized for wearing black. The very next day she is criticized for wearing red. She tells all there is left to tell at the store thinking that people won't stop gossiping until there is nothing left to gossip about.



# Chapter Twenty-nine

## Chapter Twenty-nine Summary

Will and Mary Willis are sitting outside talking that evening when Aunt Loma and Uncle Camp walk up. Miss Love shows them around the house, and Aunt Loma is angry that she has changed it so much.

Will feels that she is jealous of Miss Love's room. He is jealous also, on his Granny's behalf. She was never able to fix the house nice like she wanted, but Miss Love has.

Will feels like he may have let Miss Love down. She had confided in him first. She is known to be standoffish and private, so maybe she only told Will these things thinking he would spread it around Cold Sassy. Maybe in trying to do right and not gossip, he let her down and made her tell it for herself.

## Chapter Twenty-nine Analysis

Will agrees with Mary Willis that Miss Love shouldn't have said the things she did in the store. While Will agrees with this, he still likes Miss Love. Will feels that by saying the things she said, she is declaring war on the town. He feels that she is also declaring war on the family by refusing to give Loma the piano.

Will later learns that the piano helped sway her decision to marry Grandpa Blakeslee. Miss Love loves to play, and having a piano of her own is a great incentive to marry. If Grandpa Blakeslee hadn't deeded over the piano to Miss Love, it is doubtful if he would have given the piano to Loma either. Throughout the story, he talks about the fun they have with Miss Love at the piano and even makes the comment that she is a better player than Miss Mattie Lou was.

Mary Willis and Aunt Loma make comments that Miss Love has a lot of nerve to talk to Uncle Camp the way she does. A reasonable person might realize that the rest of the family talks worse to him, and Aunt Loma is the worst.



# Chapter Thirty - Thirty-one

## Chapter Thirty - Thirty-one Summary

The next day, Will is at Grandpa Blakeslee's house visiting with Miss Love. Will and Miss Love walk out to mess with Mr. Beautiful, the racehorse that Will went to get. When Miss Love inadvertently touches Will, he gets butterflies in his stomach. He keeps hoping she will touch him again, but she doesn't.

Miss Love reveals to Will that she is the one who told Grandpa Blakeslee that she kissed Mr. McAllister. She got nervous, thinking someone else would tell, so she did it herself. Grandpa said that Mr. McAllister was on the train back to Texas, so it was over.

Miss Love then quizzes Will on trips that the family has and is going to take. He tells her that he is sure that his mother won't change her mind about going to New York. He also says that his grandfather doesn't like it in New York and hasn't been in a long time.

Loma gives Will a journal and tells him to write his stories and things down. She has decided that he should be a writer when he grows up. Will doesn't want to be a writer, but decides that he would like to keep a journal.

## Chapter Thirty - Thirty-one Analysis

Will is not used to anyone pointing out ways that black people are treated unfairly. When Miss Love does point this out, he is very angry and defensive. He thinks to himself that Queenie does these things because she likes to, and that Miss Love doesn't understand because she isn't from Georgia. Whether the truth of what Miss Love says sinks in, he doesn't say.

Will thinks Miss Love is asking all the questions about New York because she is lonely. He finds out later that this isn't the case. She wants to take the trip herself, and she is making sure that Mary Willis won't change her mind before she tries to talk Grandpa Blakeslee into going.



# Chapter Thirty-two

## Chapter Thirty-two Summary

Grandpa Blakeslee comes to the house to announce that he and Miss Love are going to New York because Miss Love thinks that she could be helpful in picking out the housewares and clothes for the store.

Will follows Grandpa outside, and is told that Miss Love was crying the night before about the way that things are going for her in Cold Sassy. Then, she suddenly gets the idea to go to New York to get away for a little while.

Will is sure that if he tells Miss Love that Mary Willis had decided to go, she will give the ticket back. Miss Love does try to give her trip back to Mary Willis, but she won't take it. Loma tells her she has to go. She implies that Miss Love is only going to try to get Grandpa alone, so she can get pregnant.

Will feels that his mother may still have changed her mind and gone to New York, if it weren't for Loma's actions. Loma went to the store and started yelling at Grandpa for taking Love to New York. Grandpa tells her that it isn't any of her business.

Will is angry and goes to the back of the store to work off the frustration. Grandpa calls him out and asks him why he never told him that he didn't want to work in the store but wanted to farm instead. Will informs him that he has told him plenty of times; he just hasn't listened. By the end of the conversation, it is apparent that he isn't listening now. He's still making plans for when Will comes to work for him after high school.

Will goes to Grandpa's house that day to clean out the horse's stall. He sees that Miss Love is still making travel preparations, even though she acted like she was willing to give up the trip.

Grandpa Blakeslee finds another way, that day, to make the people in town angry. He starts inviting people to have Sunday services with Miss Love and him.

## Chapter Thirty-two Analysis

Will notices that Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love's stories about deciding to go on the trip to New York are completely different from each other, but doesn't say anything. Then, Will decides that she must have guessed how things would turn out with the trip, since Miss Love is still making arrangements to go. In actuality, Miss Love probably concocted the idea to go long before she talked to Grandpa about it. Grandpa later reveals that he feels guilty about it, and she admits that it was just as much her fault.

Grandpa will later reveal that he wanted to go to New York with her to get away with just her so that he could court her.



# Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-five

## Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-five Summary

That Sunday, one couple came to the services at Grandpa Blakeslee's house. Will speculates that they probably did it because they love to sing, and Effie Belle doesn't play the piano that well. They later say that they did it to remind the town that you are supposed to forgive sinners, though.

Loomis, Queenie's husband gives the sermon that day. This is another way that the town is scandalized - by Grandpa asking a black man to give the sermon. At the end of the sermon, Loomis tells Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love that God wants peace among his people, and that they should go back to their church and act right.

Hoyt misses church that day, which isn't like him. Hoyt has bought the first automobile in Cold Sassy, and he is waiting after church to pick them up in it.

The next Sunday, Hoyt and Will have practiced driving enough that they take out all the passengers who want to go except for Miss Love. Miss Love and Grandpa Blakeslee leave on the train for New York that afternoon and Hoyt goes to pick up Mary Toy.

In New York, Miss Love sends a postcard to every female in Cold Sassy. In them, she tells of some piece of clothing that she has picked out with that particular woman in mind. Mary Toy gets a postcard saying only that she has a surprise. The card that Will gets simply says thank you for the work that he is doing at Grandpa Blakeslee's house, and with the horse while they are gone.

Will is driving the car when he passes Lightfoot McLendon. He offers to take her for a ride and she gets in. Will takes her to the cemetery and they talk for a while. Lightfoot's father has died, and she wishes that she could put an angel on his grave like one that she sees here. She misses him, and now she is being forced to drop out of school. Will is trying to get her to stop crying and pulls her up. He holds her for a while and then he finds himself kissing her. Suddenly they are interrupted by a neighbor, who tells Lightfoot not to be corrupting Will. Will turns for a moment and Lightfoot runs away.

## Chapter Thirty-three - Thirty-five Analysis

Mary Willis is upset about losing her trip to New York, but Hoyt makes up for it with the car. Mary Willis and the rest of the family are proud of the car. Mary Willis feels better about the trip to New York because now she has something great that Miss Love doesn't have.

Will feels sorry for Lightfoot, but doesn't understand what it's like to live life as she does. Lightfoot tells him that she can't come back to school because she has to go to work, but Will still expects to see her in the fall.





Will did not think he was going to kiss Lightfoot the way he did, but he had imagined it several times since seeing Mr. McAllister kiss Miss Love. Lightfoot didn't push Will away, but she did tell him no. When the neighbor stops them, most of the blame is put on Lightfoot, not Will, because she is a mill girl.



# Chapter Thirty-six - Thirty-seven

## Chapter Thirty-six - Thirty-seven Summary

When Will goes home, he decides that he won't wait for someone else to tell it, he is going to confess to Mary Willis what he has done. He gets a whipping and is also grounded from driving the car for the next two months.

The next day, he has to go to the store. He is ashamed and feels that he has shamed the family. He is told by various people to either wait until he is older and knows how not to get caught, or stay away from the mill people altogether.

A telegram comes saying that Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love are coming home. It has been two weeks. Feelings are smoothed over, and Hoyt and Marry Willis invite the couple to supper.

Grandpa and Love hand out presents to everyone. Loma is upset at first that the dress they have brought back for her is white, and she can't wear it since she is in mourning. This was Grandpa's idea, saying she shouldn't be wearing black all the time, but Loma is upset with Love. Love smooths things over with her by promising to make her a brand new black hat for the fall.

Grandpa insists that Will drive them home. Even though he is grounded from driving, Hoyt lets him with the command that he come home as soon as possible. When they get to Grandpa Blakeslee's house, Will finds out that the couple has bought a car and are going to start selling them at the store.

Miss Love and Grandpa Blakeslee want Will to teach them to drive. After they have learned how, they are going to have a drawing once a week for free lessons. When their car arrives by train, they want Will to drive it to the store. They tell Will that he isn't allowed to tell anyone, even Hoyt. He decides that if Hoyt doesn't understand, he'll just take the whipping.

## Chapter Thirty-six - Thirty-seven Analysis

When the couple are due to arrive at the Tweedy house, Mary Willis has Will remove the Bible from the parlor. Will understands why when he opens it up and finds that Mary Willis has made deep impressions in the page trying to erase Miss Love's marriage.

Mary Willis won't let Miss Love help clear the dishes. This, in their culture is the same as saying that she is not family. Grandpa, seeing this, rubs in the trip to New York by asking Love to tell all about it.

Aunt Carrie and Grandpa think that they are just making conversation. They are not aware that they are making things worse.



# Chapter Thirty-eight - Thirty-nine

## Chapter Thirty-eight - Thirty-nine Summary

Grandpa Blakeslee is very impressed with all Miss Love's ideas for the business. She knows to whom they might be able to sell which outfits and cars.

Granny Blakeslee didn't get much in the way of material possessions out of Grandpa Blakeslee. Miss Love, however, is getting more than anyone ever dreamed possible. Will observes as Miss Love hints at a bathroom, but never actually asks for one. Although Grandpa says no at the time, Will is sure that eventually, Grandpa Blakeslee will not only give in but think it was his idea.

The day comes when Grandpa Blakeslee's Pierce arrives on the train. The whole town has shown up to see what Grandpa's big surprise is. Grandpa tells Hoyt that Will is going to drive it to the store. Will is excited about getting to drive the car in the parade, but he's also nervous, since he has never driven this car before. Grandpa Blakeslee announces that he is starting a car dealership and that there are free gifts at the store. Hoyt and Loomis help Will get the car started, and he takes off with the sounds of the two town bands, Hoyt's Cadillac behind him and the noise of an excited crowd all around him.

No one bought a car that day, but the store did a booming business in everything else. Grandpa Blakeslee tells Will that he better get Loomis to do his milking the following morning because Will is going to teach Grandpa to drive. The next morning, Grandpa and Miss Love are dressed in riding outfits, and Will takes them down a back road and kills the engine. He shows them how the controls need to be set to crank the engine. Every time Grandpa walks around to start it, Miss Love messes the controls up so that it won't start. When he is walking back, she puts them back as they should be. Will tells him that he must not be cranking hard enough. This continues, with Grandpa wearing himself out, and Will and Miss Love laughing.

After Grandpa finally gets the motor cranked, Will instructs him on driving it. Grandpa lets the car get out of control and lands them in a shallow ditch. Grandpa Blakeslee tells Will that he isn't ever going to drive again. Miss Love was too shook up to try it that day, but later proved to be a pretty good driver, until one day when a bee flew in her dress and the Pierce careens wildly out of control. After this, she announces that she'll never drive again either.

## Chapter Thirty-eight - Thirty-nine Analysis

Grandpa gets angry with Miss Love for not being part of the big day when the Pierce arrives. He also gets angry with her for messing with the controls when he is learning to drive. Will notes that he doesn't seem to stay angry with her for long. They are happy and quick to laugh when they are with each other.

The plan was that after Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love learn to drive, between them, Hoyt, and Will, there will never be a shortage of people able to drive at the store. That number has been significantly reduced. Now there is only Hoyt and Will. If they are still to give out free driving lessons every week, it will be Hoyt or Will to give them. Since Hoyt is so busy with the store, it will mostly be Will.



# Chapter Forty

## Chapter Forty Summary

Miss Love had the idea that with Hoyt's Cadillac and Grandpa Blakeslee's Pierce parked in front of the store, it would be easy to draw a crowd and sell cars. There were always people who wanted to look over the cars. It was also true that the people weren't nearly as concerned with keeping the cars nice as the owners were. After a week, Grandpa finally admitted that the cars wouldn't last long that way and told Will to put them in back.

Grandpa still made sure that everyone knew that the cars were back there, telling people what a "dang marvel" they are. Miss Love was interested in trying to sell the garments that go along with the cars. The dust veils, the dusters and goggles. When Grandpa refused to let her buy a mannequin to model them in the window, she turns herself into one. This draws a crowd, and Grandpa loves that.

When the weather starts getting cold, Miss Love asks to go on a motoring trip. She wants to go overnight, but Grandpa tells her that she will have to settle for a Sunday trip. They originally plan to invite Will's family along. They drive a long way, with Miss Love in the back with Grandpa Blakeslee. On the way back, there is a car flipped over in the middle of the road. Will dodges the car and lands in the shallow creek. Will and Grandpa help the man get his car upright again, and the strangers take off. It is right after they leave that Will realizes there is a hole in the radiator.

Miss Love wants to plug it with grits that they get from a neighbor. Grandpa Blakeslee likes this idea also. Will follows a neighbor woman up a hill to her house to get the bucket of grits. He pays her, and when he is on his way back down, he sees Miss Love and Grandpa kissing.

## Chapter Forty Analysis

Will starts the trip out happy to be along with Miss Love and Grandpa Blakeslee. Pretty soon, though, he starts feeling like the third wheel. He's the chauffeur rather than part of the group.

Will is unhappy about it and seeing Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love kissing. He feels that Miss Love has gotten all the material possessions that she ever wanted and Granny never had. He feels that she should be happy with what she has instead of wanting more. What Will doesn't realize until that night is that Grandpa is the one who wants more.



# Chapter Forty-one

## Chapter Forty-one Summary

Will hides behind a tree until they are through kissing. Will talks Grandpa Blakeslee out of using grits to stop up the radiator. It might work to fix the leak, but how would you get them out? He is sure that they would ruin the radiator.

Grandpa agrees with Will so they decide to try to make it to the nearest town. Will pours water and oil into the car all the way. They stop at the nearest house, where they are put up for the night. The young man who lives there works in Athens and agrees to get a message that a mechanic is needed. The mechanic won't be sent on Sunday, so Grandpa also has the man call Hoyt and tell him that they won't be back until Monday.

The evening is spent in casual conversation with their hosts. After supper, the three are led upstairs. There is a big bed where Miss Love and Grandpa Blakeslee are invited to sleep. In a small adjoining room are two cots, where Will is told to sleep. Grandpa wants to sleep in the bed with Miss Love like it was assumed would happen. They finally arrange themselves with Will and Grandpa in the bed, and Miss Love on a cot in the adjoining room.

Will pretends to sleep while Grandpa goes to the adjoining room to talk to Miss Love. Grandpa confesses to Miss Love that he has wanted her ever since he first saw her. He tells her that the romantic aspect of his marriage with Mattie Lou dissipated after he stopped sleeping with her. He stopped sleeping with her due to the fact that he was told she would die if she ever had another child.

Miss Love feels guilty with this admission. She insists that she never had any clue as to how Grandpa Blakeslee felt about her until during the trip to New York. Grandpa assures her that he was careful never to let it show. Miss Love confides in Grandpa that the reason Mr. McAllister broke off his engagement with her was because she told him that she was raped by her father. She tells grandpa that because she is not pure, she has given up on having a real marriage.

Grandpa doesn't console her as Will expects him to at this revelation. Grandpa is upset and paces most of the rest of the night. As soon as he hears the rest of the house awake, Will jumps out of bed as though he has slept the entire night.

The mechanic arrives early the next morning to repair the radiator. As soon as it is fixed, they take their host for a ride and then start back to Cold Sassy. Will notes that he might have thought he dreamed the night before if it weren't for the fact that Grandpa rides up front with him on the way back.



## Chapter Forty-one Analysis

The woman who puts the three travelers up for the night is embarrassed and keeps apologizing that she doesn't have indoor plumbing or electricity. Will notes that although Miss Love insists that it is fine, she never takes the step to encourage the woman by telling her that she doesn't have these luxuries either. This suggests that Miss Love was too proud to admit the truth to a stranger.

It is revealed while discussing sleeping arrangements that Grandpa Blakeslee slept on the floor during the couple's stay in New York. Will notes that this means that Mary Willis and Aunt Loma worried about Love getting pregnant while they were gone for nothing.

Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love have fallen in love with each other. Miss Love is not ready to admit it, though. She insists that she can't have a real marriage because of being raped as a child by her father. She also seems a little scared of the change and guilty about marrying him. When Grandpa had told her that he wanted her to marry him, he had told her that there was another woman in town that he would ask if she said no. He reveals now that that was a lie to persuade her.



# Chapter Forty-two - Forty-three

## Chapter Forty-two - Forty-three Summary

In the next few weeks, Will notes that Grandpa has let his hair grow back out. He isn't happy and lets his mean streak show more. There is a hotel owner that Grandpa feels shorted him on a land deal in years past. When the owner advertises that he is going to have a drawing to rename the hotel, Grandpa puts his entry in to name it after himself. When his entry is drawn, Grandpa makes him stick to the deal and the hotel is named "The Rucker Blakeslee Hotel."

The next day Grandpa gets sick. From hearing his symptoms, Will thinks he may be playing sick. He remembers that Grandpa has told him that when he doesn't know what to do, he should try something, anything, rather than doing nothing.

After a while Grandpa thinks that he is well enough to go outside and he accompanies Miss Love on rides in the buggy. They were soon on good footing with each other again.

Aunt Loma has been busy planning and directing the Christmas play. She asks Will to catch a mouse to drop during one of the scenes to create a scripted chaos. He and his friends catch nineteen in all. When the cue comes to let the mouse out, they let all nineteen of the huge rats out. This causes chaos on stage and off. From his vantage point from behind the stage, Will can see that Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love find it hilarious. Everyone else is either scared or furious, except Loma, who is sobbing.

Will gets a whipping from his father and is told to go apologize. He does, and Loma tells him that she'll hate him forever for what he did.

When Hosie Roach comes to the store looking for a job, all cleaned up, Will can tell that Grandpa Blakeslee likes him. He even tells Hoyt in front of Camp that he wishes he could hire that boy. He would make three of Camp.

Uncle Camp convinces Aunt Loma to go see a friend from college. While she is gone, he tries to fix the sink, puts a tablecloth under the table, waits until Hoyt comes over to look at the sink like he asked, and shoots himself in the head.

The family takes care of the body, and before anyone else has a chance to know, Will fixes the sink correctly as it is still leaking. He also reads the note that Camp left for Aunt Loma. It cites that he is committing suicide because he isn't good for anything. Now Aunt Loma can have some peace, and Mr. Blakeslee can hire someone better.





## Chapter Forty-two - Forty-three Analysis

Will's practical joke goes off exactly as planned. He doesn't feel badly at first because he knows that the play would have been quickly forgotten if it weren't for his joke. He does feel bad for the way that it upset Loma, however.

Loma is back to hating Will, though they had been nice to each other since the stories told on the camping trip. Will finds that this familiar ground is much more comfortable than being friendly with each other.

Camp feels that he is good for nothing and everyone will be better off without him. What everyone wanted him to do was to work a little harder and be a little less lazy. The last day that he worked in the store, Will notes that he did well.



# Chapter Forty-four - Forty-five

## Chapter Forty-four - Forty-five Summary

Loma walks around after Camp's death in a haze. People in Cold Sassy come to Aunt Loma's house to pay their condolences, both that her husband has passed away and that he is going to hell. They show up but don't intend to participate in a wake. Once everything in the parlor is under control, Grandpa Blakeslee walks upstairs to see about Loma and she embraces him and cries. She feels terribly guilty about how she treated Camp and verbalizes this.

Grandpa forces the town and the preacher to give Camp proper last respects. Since Loma is a young woman, it wouldn't be considered proper for her to live alone; therefore, she moves in with Mary Willis. Life is easier for Aunt Loma now, and she gradually adjusts to it. She now has time to do the writing she wants to do.

Miss Love decides she is going to buy herself a bathroom and an indoor faucet. Grandpa Blakeslee has ordered her a gramophone and records.

Things are hectic at the store. Grandpa decides that he has to hire someone and tells Will to tell Hosie to come to the store. Good to his word, Hosie shows up the next day at the store barefoot but clean. The next day, Hosie impresses Grandpa and Hoyt with his eagerness to please.

The next week, Miss Love takes Loma as an apprentice milliner. Loma loves being back around people and in the spotlight again. Loma is much happier than she has been in a long time.

## Chapter Forty-four - Forty-five Analysis

The prevailing doctrine in Cold Sassy at this time dictates that anyone who commits suicide goes to hell. One must be forgiven of their sins in order to get to heaven. One must ask forgiveness for their sins in order to be forgiven. If these statements are true, then a person would not have time to ask forgiveness for committing suicide before he died, so he could not be forgiven for it or make it into heaven.

Most felt it was a shame on the family for a person to commit suicide. When it occurred, the body was generally buried quickly without a wake or funeral service. Grandpa felt that these behaviors were hypocritical, since everyone sins. Grandpa would not allow anyone to dictate how Camp should be buried.

Will wonders if Grandpa Blakeslee is trying to make up for being mean to Camp in the past. He wonders if Camp would have killed himself anyway had Grandpa and Loma not been so mean to him. Will also feels guilty that he wasn't nicer to Camp.



Will had felt terribly guilty about the way he treated Uncle Camp. When Aunt Loma moves in with them, he starts being angry at Uncle Camp instead.

Will is jealous of Hosie Roach. He feels that he will be taking Will's place. He knows that Hosie is smart and a hard worker. He also knows that he'll be able to do much more than Will because he knows that Hosie will drop out of school if he gets the job. Will acts hateful toward Hosie for not coming to the store the afternoon that Grandpa calls for him, but Will knows that it is because Hosie doesn't want to come in dirty.



# Chapter Forty-six - Forty-seven

## Chapter Forty-six - Forty-seven Summary

On Will's fifteenth birthday, he sees Lightfoot again. He has thought about her a lot but hasn't seen her since he kissed her. He apologizes to her. She tells him that she is going to marry Hosie.

The next Friday night Grandpa goes to lock up when he is held at gunpoint and made to open back up. There are two robbers and one gun. They make Grandpa open the safe to be disappointed by only finding a will and some stock certificates. They tell Grandpa to show them where the money is. Grandpa tells them it is in the nail keg. They turn it over and coins roll everywhere. As the inebriated robbers crawl around grabbing for the money, Grandpa knocks them unconscious.

When they come to, Grandpa is holding the robbers hostage with their own gun. He tells one of them to call the authorities. Just to show the men that he can shoot, he shoots a string hanging from the ceiling. The telephone operator didn't pick up, and Grandpa, in an effort to convince the two that they should comply, gives another target shot. The robbers, aware that they only have two bullets take this chance and beat Grandpa up. He has several cracked ribs, and is in general very badly beaten.

Miss Pearl, the switchboard operator, plugs back in in time to hear the fight. She contacts authorities, who go and tend to Grandpa.

## Chapter Forty-six - Forty-seven Analysis

Will is upset about Lightfoot marrying Hosie. He is jealous and wants her for himself. Will may want Lightfoot, but he wouldn't be willing to say so in public, although he doesn't admit that now.

Grandpa Blakeslee has done a lot for Hosie. It is because of Grandpa that Hosie and Lightfoot can afford to get married. Now Grandpa gives Hosie a day off to go get married and gives him a raise also.

Grandpa later admits that he was showing off and that everything would have been fine if he hadn't.



# Chapter Forty-eight - Forty-nine

## Chapter Forty-eight - Forty-nine Summary

Grandpa Blakeslee is in bad shape. Will notes that he isn't only hurt physically - his pride is also hurt.

Will hears Grandpa and Miss Love talking. Grandpa and Miss Love both say that they can feel God's presence. Grandpa then tells Miss Love about the verse of scripture that Will has been wondering about that says ask and it shall be given to you. Grandpa says that he thinks that he feels this verse is talking about spiritual gifts. If you ask anything spiritual, God will give it to you.

By the middle of the week, Grandpa Blakeslee is running a fever and coughing. The doctor is sent for and the family gathers, worrying. Miss Love tells Will that if Grandpa dies, she is only staying in Cold Sassy as long as it takes to sell the house.

Mary Willis and Will take turns all that night helping Miss Love. The fever rages through all of their efforts to lower it. At one point Grandpa goes back in his mind to the war when he was a boy. After this is over, he is back with Mattie Lou. Grandpa is now coughing up blood. The next day the fever is still up, and Grandpa is with Mattie Lou in his mind. Miss Love runs out crying. Outside, she confides in Will that she is carrying Grandpa's child and hasn't had a chance to tell him yet. She wants the chance to tell him thinking that he'll have another reason to fight.

While she is gone, Grandpa's fever breaks. He is back to the present, but he is asleep. Loma runs to tell Hoyt the good news. When Grandpa wakes up, Love tells him her news. She lies beside him and Will lies on the daybed and all three sleep. Will is awakened later to Love's screams. Grandpa Blakeslee has died.

## Chapter Forty-eight - Forty-nine Analysis

It really hurts Miss Love when Grandpa doesn't remember her or doesn't remember that he is married to her. She is sure that Grandpa will fight for the chance for a son. She feels sure that it is a boy. Will doesn't tell her, but his mother says that Mattie Lou used to always think that it would be a boy but it never was. It was the fact that Grandpa wanted a boy so bad that most likely made these women think they were carrying boys.



# Chapter Fifty

## Chapter Fifty Summary

Will runs to tell the family that Grandpa Blakeslee has died. When everyone is dressed and in the car, Hoyt says they have to go to the store. About two months prior, Grandpa had told Hoyt that there was a sealed letter in his safe. Hoyt was to get it and read it to the family before Grandpa's body was moved if something were to happen to him.

The letter tells the family that he wanted Mattie Lou's funeral to be a thank you to her for living. He wanted Camp's funeral to tell people not to judge. He wants his own funeral to remind people that dying isn't always bad.

Grandpa wants to be buried in the pine box that Mattie Lou's casket came in. He wants to be taken straight from the home to the grave site. He gives other very detailed instructions about how the private funeral should be held and then gets down to details about the funeral party.

Grandpa Blakeslee demands that a week or two after he is dead, they should all get together at a church or ball park for a carnival. Anyone who doesn't follow his wishes is out of the will.

The family carries out Grandpa Blakeslee's requests and then attends the reading of the will. Grandpa has already deeded the house, all in it, and a thousand dollars to Love. Grandpa left the house that Mary Willis was living in to her plus a thousand dollars. The house that Love lived in that is now rented is left to her along with a thousand dollars. Everything that is left is to be split equally among the three. If there is another heir, he or she will also get an equal share. Grandpa leaves Will four-hundred dollars for college with the stipulation that he work at the store for at least ten years after college.

Miss Love doesn't immediately tell the family about the baby but does eventually. She also tells Will that she has decided not to leave town. She doesn't know where she would go, and it would be leaving the only family her son would have.

A month after Grandpa Blakeslee is buried, Cold Sassy's name is changed to Progressive City and the one remaining sassafras tree is cut down. Eight years later, Will still has a piece of that tree in a box, along with "my journal, my can of tobacco tags, the newspaper write-up when I got run over by the train, a photograph of me and Miss Love and Grandpa in the Pierce, my Ag College diploma for the University - and the buckeye that Lightfoot gave me."

## Chapter Fifty Analysis

Grandpa Blakeslee never wanted a normal funeral. He didn't want people to be in mourning for him for a long time. He wants them to go on with life because life and God



are about good things and too often people focus on the bad. Not all the people at Grandpa's farewell party are as cheerful as he may have liked, but they are there, fulfilling his wishes, giving Cold Sassy one last thing to talk about.

Mary Willis and Aunt Loma's fears are realized when Miss Love announces her baby. This means that their inheritance has shrunk some.

Will is offended that Grandpa Blakeslee thinks that he can buy Will's future. He knows that Will doesn't want to come to work at the store, so cuts him out of the will if he doesn't. Will is adamant that he can't be bought - his future is his alone to decide. Will reveals that eight years later, the things in his box are still of great value to him. They are simple things that have an interesting story. His Ag College diploma shows that he really did do what he wanted to do, not what anyone else wanted him to.



# Characters

## Will Tweedy

Will Tweedy is the character from whose perspective this story is told. He is fourteen years old when the book begins. Will comes from a wealthy family and his background dictates that he should value certain people's friendship over others, but he doesn't naturally have this in him. He has a crush on a "linthead," Lightfoot McLendon. He likes the black cook's husband, and he likes Love Simpson, the woman who married a man only three weeks a widower. Will doesn't have natural tendencies to segregate himself, but he learns to through conscious thought of bringing shame to his family through bad associations.

Will struggles with many issues in this novel as he adjusts to the changes in his family. He likes a girl with whom he is not supposed to associate. He feels consistent guilt over having what others in town are lacking. Will's loyalties are stretched between his mother and his grandfather.

Will is a little mischievous, never letting the chance at a practical joke pass him by. At times this makes him endearing to others and other times a pain. He is held in special regard by his Grandpa Blakeslee, who never had a son himself.

## Grandpa Blakeslee

Enoch Rucker Blakeslee, referred to by Will as Grandpa Blakeslee, and by most of Cold Sassy as Mr. Blakeslee, is one of the main characters of Will's story. Grandpa Blakeslee is fifty-nine years old at the time of this story. He is a man who loves humor and practical jokes, finding humor in things that others may not.

Grandpa Blakeslee is a veteran of the civil war. He hates Yankees, and even comes up with a "Southern Independence Day" to mock the United States. Grandpa Blakeslee does marry Miss Love, though, and many refer to her as a Yankee. Miss Love is not actually from a northern state, though.

Grandpa Blakeslee is a character who undergoes many changes throughout the story. The main thing that causes the changes is the fact that he is in love with Love Simpson. He does what he feels he has to in order to win her over, ignoring, for the most part, all of the gossip that it causes.

## Love Simpson

Love Simpson is the milliner in Grandpa Blakeslee's store. She was previously engaged to a Texas Rancher, who jilted her because she was sexually abused by her father. Love is not looking for love in Cold Sassy. When Grandpa Blakeslee offers her his hand





in marriage, she takes it not so she can have a husband, but so that she can have a family and a house. As time progresses, she falls in love with Grandpa Blakeslee.

Love is described as a pretty woman. She is a kind, private person with a flair for fashion. She has many ideas for Grandpa Blakeslee's store and talks him into making many changes in various aspects of his life.

## **Mattie Lou Blakeslee**

Mattie Lou Blakeslee is Will Tweedy's grandmother, usually referred to as Granny Blakeslee. The novel begins with Granny dead for three weeks, but she is described and remembered in detail. Granny Blakeslee is liked and missed by her family and most others in *Cold Sassy*. She was known for taking care of the sick. She took great pains in the garden, wasn't much of a housekeeper and is described as being physically unattractive.

## **Loma Williams**

Loma Williams, usually referred to as Aunt Loma, is Mary Willis Tweedy's sister. Loma is generally described as mean and lazy. Loma's dream was to become an actor. Grandpa Tweedy wouldn't let her leave, because an actor would shame the family. To spite her father, Loma marries Uncle Camp. They have one child, Campbell Jr.

Married life doesn't suit her at all. She is a completely unhappy person. There are very few glimpses of Loma happy until after her husband dies.

## **Campbell Williams**

Campbell Williams, usually referred to as Uncle Camp, is Loma Williams' husband. He is generally considered lazy and stupid. When he first asks Grandpa Blakeslee for a job, he is turned down. After marrying Loma, Grandpa Blakeslee hires him.

Camp is not respected by anyone in the story. Loma only married him to spite her father and treats him terribly. The rest of the family feels that he is low class, lazy and basically good for nothing. Camp eventually kills himself, leaving Loma a letter stating that he just can't seem to do anything right.

## **Mary Willis Tweedy**

Mary Willis Tweedy is Will Tweedy's mother. Will comes from a family that is well-off financially. They are more educated than most, come from a respectable lineage and have house servants. Having this background, his mother typically looks for the same traits in others to validate sustaining a relationship with them.



Mary Willis is generally described as a forgiving and an easy-going character, except when it comes to Love Simpson. Mary Willis hates her as she hates no one else. She hates her for "shaming" her family. She also feels that Love is trying to steal her inheritance and take her mother's place.

## **Hoyt Tweedy**

Hoyt Tweedy is Will Tweedy's father. He works in Grandpa Blakeslee's store. He is a hard worker and a very religious man. The only way he lets anything against his religion slide is if Grandpa Blakeslee says so.

## **Lightfoot McLendon**

Lightfoot McLendon is the mill girl with whom Will is smitten. He feels that she is different from the other mill girls. Like the other mill kids, Lightfoot has a significant disadvantage in life. Her parents have died; she is being forced to drop out of school to work; she doesn't have enough to eat or good clothes to wear. Will likes her but keeps this secret for the most part because it would be shameful for someone like him to be seen with someone like her.

## **Hosie Roach**

Hosie Roach is the mill boy with whom Will is constantly fighting. He comes from a poor background, and like the other mill kids, has to work, doesn't have enough to eat, and doesn't have a bathtub or good clothes. Hosie is older than all the other kids at school, but he refuses to drop out because he wants to make himself better in hopes of doing something other than millwork for the rest of his life. Hosie finally does drop out of school when Grandpa Blakeslee hires him in the store.

## **Mary Toy Tweedy**

Mary Toy is Will Tweedy's little sister. She plays a very small role in this novel because she is staying with a relative through the majority of this story.

## **Loomis**

Loomis is the Tweedy's cook's husband.



## Objects/Places

### Cold Sassy

Cold Sassy is the small town in Georgia where the story takes place. It is named for a grove of Sassafras trees that used to be there, but town authorities would like to change its name.

### Mill Town

Mill Town is the place where the cotton mill is and the mill workers live.

### Blind Tillie Trestle

Blind Tillie Trestle is the place where Will gets run over by a train.

### Blind Tillie Creek

Blind Tillie Creek is a place where Will goes fishing.

### Blue Ridge

Lightfoot McLendon comes from the foothills of Blue Ridge.

### Commerce

Commerce is a nearby town of Cold Sassy's. Its original name was Harmony Grove.

### New York

New York is where Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love go on vacation.

### North Carolina

North Carolina is where Will's ancestors come from.

### Athens

Athens is a town near enough to visit on occasion.



## **Tallulah Falls**

Tallulah Falls is where Aunt Loma and Uncle Camp take their honeymoon.

## **Cussin' Creek**

Cussin' Creek is a nearby fishing hole.



## Social Sensitivity

The fabric of Southern community life at the turn-of-the-century is rendered in the fictional town of Cold Sassy, Georgia. A May-December romance scandalizes the rural community as one of the town's leading citizens, E. Rucker Blakeslee, marries a milliner employed at his store. The nuptials occur only three weeks after the death of Miss Mattie Lou, his wife of thirtysix years. The marriage brings not only the disapproval of the townsfolk but of his two married daughters as well. An emerging portrait of love amid scorn is recounted by Rucker's fourteen-year-old grandson, Will Tweedy.

His daughters are not only outraged at the brazenness of Rucker's sudden marriage to Love Simpson, the milliner, but fearful of the potential loss of inheritance that could result from the union. Rucker Blakeslee's dominance and unquestioned patriarchy illustrate the bonds between economic security and familial loyalty typical of this era.

His daughters' fierce disapproval of the new marriage is kept in check only by the fact that their daddy is also their husbands' employer and the owner of their homes.

The shroud of mystery surrounding Miss Love's past has fed the suspicions of the community since her arrival from Baltimore two years earlier. Why such a lovely lady over thirty has remained single puzzles the town. Cold Sassy only needs the hint of impropriety to demonstrate the cardinal rule of prejudice, to distrust what is different.

The townspeople carry a sense of superiority over the poor, the black, the outsider, and certainly the Northerner.

Love Simpson suffers the consequences of social nonconformity as she is banished from her church and publicly insulted.

Yet Miss Love retains her dignity.

Her lively Northern style juxtaposed against the mores of the ladies of Cold Sassy allows for some lighthearted, as well as pointed, observations on Southern manners. Her peculiar views occasionally throw Will off balance, exposing him to thoughts and questions that no good Southerner would ever consider. When Miss Love raises questions about the deferential practices of the hired "colored" help, Will reacts with anger at her failure to understand the ways of Georgian life.

Social injustice in Cold Sassy is not confined to racial issues. A cotton mill on the outskirts of town employs poor mountain folk who reside in an adjoining neighborhood referred to as Mill Town. "Lintheads," as they are called because of their appearance after a shift in the mill, are gaunt and sadfaced with matted, unkept white-blond hair. The unsanitary living conditions result commonly in "the cooties and the itch." The children go to school sporadically, very seldom completing more than two years. Will is very uneasy around them, due in part to their grimy appearance and in part to his growing awareness of the disparities caused by class. The "lintheads" carried a more



severe social stigma than other white poor in the story. In *Cold Sassy* prejudice is proportionate to the degree of observable difference between the groups. The blue eyes and towheaded hair which distinguish them from the mainstream of town folk are similar to a racial or ethnic barrier.

The novel gives insight into class distinctions and mobility in rural white Georgia in this period.

## Techniques

As Burns labored on her family history in the early 1970s, a journalist by training and a perfectionist by nature, she left no stone unturned. She interviewed, she collected, she scoured, she assembled. She believed in knowing people through their speech, and arduously collected colloquialisms, patterns of speech, phraseology, curious names, local superstition, death stories, and folk lore. In creating a novel she followed the adage of "writing what you know about" and turned to her ancestral home town, renaming it Cold Sassy, to weave her collected treasures of regional color into the novel's fabric.

Cold Sassy Tree is a marriage of the coming-of-age novel and the universal love story. The novel accomplishes its dual purpose through the narration of Will Tweedy, who chronicles both his passage into adolescence and the love story of his mentor, grandfather, E. Rucker Blakeslee and his new bride.

This technique affords the novel with the freshness, innocence and vitality invoked by youth. These qualities are well suited to the exuberance and hopefulness that underscores the developing relationship. Will's youthful "boy howdy" approach to life symbolizes the rejuvenating, healing effects of the love blossoming in the lives of Rucker and Love. In turn, Rucker's poignant maxims create a framework for Will's early struggles in understanding life.

The novel offers a painstaking recreation of Georgian small town life at the turn-of-the-century. Olive Burns sketches the economic, social, religious, and political components of the community in a fashion that is instructive without being laborious. The dialect in Cold Sassy Tree reflects the regional usage of the period.

True to Southern story-telling tradition, humor makes a significant contribution to the tone of Cold Sassy Tree.

The heavier moments in the novel are countered with Will's outrageous yarns and practical jokes generally aimed at Loma.



# Themes

## Class

In post civil war Cold Sassy, things are slow to change. Even though African Americans are now free, they are still looked down on by many in town. Those who work for white families have certain rules that they follow, though most are unspoken.

The reader gets a glimpse of servant life through the eyes of Miss Love. She knows the reason that Queenie uses a mason jar to drink out of is that Queenie knows that the family doesn't want her drinking out of their cups. She uses an old fork to eat with and an old pan to eat out of for the same reasons. When Queenie, and other black servants wash their dishes, they wash them right after the good dishes and right before the animal dishes. This subservient treatment is prevalent, but mostly overlooked.

Miss Love and Aunt Carrie are the only two in Cold Sassy concerned with women's rights movements. Any of the other women who might want to be involved in this movement are hindered by their husbands. The two are serious about the movement, but for the most part, not taken seriously by others.

Those in mill town are considered second-class citizens in Cold Sassy. They are required to work hard for little pay. They live in complete poverty, often going hungry. The children in mill town are made to start work at a young age to help the family. Will hates Hosie, who comes from this part of town, probably, in part because he doesn't really understand him or where he comes from. Even though he is told that Lightfoot has to quit school, he doesn't believe it until she does. Will likes Lightfoot, but would never admit it because of the shame that it would bring on the family.

## Traditions

Cold Sassy is full of tradition. The main reason that Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love are such a target for criticism is that Grandpa often ignores these traditions. The first tradition they break is the tradition of mourning a loved one for at least one year—this means wearing black and mourning bands, and most importantly, waiting at least a year to remarry.

When Miss Love is targeted by the church, Grandpa Blakeslee breaks the tradition of church attendance. People are expected to do and not to do certain things on Sunday. They are always expected to go to church. They are expected to only play hymns on the piano on Sunday. Grandpa Blakeslee and Miss Love begin holding their own church at home. They then let Mrs. Effie Belle catch them playing music that is definitely not church music. Grandpa even goes so far as to advertise it, giving out invitations.

Grandpa Blakeslee breaks another tradition in Uncle Camp's funeral. It is expected that when one commits suicide, they are going to hell automatically, and thus are shaming





the family. These people, therefore, are buried quickly, sometimes without even markers. Grandpa is not going to let this happen. He doesn't feel that it is his place to judge this sin, and it isn't the place of the rest of the town, either. Because of these feelings, he throws Uncle Camp a nice funeral.

Grandpa Blakeslee also breaks funeral traditions in his dictation for his own funeral. He wants his funeral to be a frugal, simple one. He then wants a carnival-type funeral party thrown, where no one is allowed to wear black or cry. This sort of behavior is unheard of in *Cold Sassy*. Mary Willis is very afraid of what people will say, so she makes sure that everyone knows that they have no choice.

## Religion

Will and Grandpa Blakeslee discuss religion a lot throughout this novel. Will has been raised in a very religious home. His father and Grandfather Tweedy are very devout in making sure that the letter of the law is followed. They don't want anything being done on a Sunday that shouldn't be done. They don't want anything sounding like doubt or sacrilegious spoken.

Will respects his father but doesn't understand all the aspects of religion. One of the things that bothers him is the fact that anytime anyone dies, people say that it is God's will or it was just their time. When Will lives through getting ran over by the train, people say that it just wasn't God's will, or that it just wasn't his time.

Will doesn't understand this and talks to Grandpa. Grandpa says that he doesn't think that it is ever God's will that someone should die. It is just that God has designed bodies so that whenever one has suffered too much, or has too much wrong with them, they are able to die and end the suffering.

Will also wonders about the scripture that says "ask and it shall be given to you." He says that he has asked for a million dollars and didn't get it. Grandpa tells him that this isn't praying, it's wishing. After thinking about it for a while, Grandpa tells Miss Love that he thinks that the bible is talking about spiritual things when it says that.

## Significant Topics

Olive Burns stated that in *Cold Sassy Tree* she wished to "express the lyric wonder and electric yearning between two people in love." *Cold Sassy Tree* is first of all a romance. Rucker's life with the late Mattie Lou and his current courtship of Miss Love reveal great depths of commitment, care, loyalty and passion. In their thirty-six years of marriage Rucker and Miss Mattie Lou experienced the companionship, devotion and kindness that grow out a life together. The couple endured the hardships of difficult childbirth and early child death, with only two of seven children reaching adulthood. These traumas, however, scarred their marriage and thwarted their intimacy, resulting in an eventual loss of desire.



Still Rucker's love and respect for Miss Mattie Lou shines through as he repeatedly credits her for any good thing that exists in him.

The premise of the union between Rucker Blakeslee and Love Simpson was that of a marriage of convenience; she agrees to look after Rucker and his home and in return he deeds her the house and furnishings. Miss Love's motive for choosing this celibate cohabitation remains a mystery even to Rucker until he declares his desire for her. He confesses that his love for her began while Miss Mattie Lou was still alive, a fact which tormented him during his wife's fatal illness. In his persistence to know why she will not have him, Love reveals to him the wounds of incest. After the novel's "moment of truth" when each discloses the guilt and shame that they have borne in secret, their relationship assumes new depth. The growth of their love brings renewal and healing to both characters.

Miss Love's presence in Rucker's life revives his spirits and he proves himself more than a match for the wagging tongues and nay-sayers of Cold Sassy.

His steady devotion eventually wins Miss Love's heart. Olive Burns wrote of her intent to portray sexuality both humanly and respectfully. Burns establishes the beauty and tension of their flowering relationship by slowly revealing the increasing tenderness and pleasure of their marriage, and selecting a youth, who himself is an emblem of innocence, for the narrative voice.

The dynamic of the Blakeslee clan revolves around jealousy, guilt, tolerance and loyalty in constant interplay.

In 1906, the family experiences the death of Miss Mattie Lou, Rucker's remarriage, a suicide, Rucker's eventual death and Miss Love's pregnancy.

Each event demonstrates familial interdependence in the midst of an ever shifting matrix.

The story is full of dying, as Burns said, "people died a lot back then."

Death bookends the novel, with Will's recounting of his grandmother's death and funeral near its opening and his grandfather's death at its close. Death's recurrence throughout the novel unifies the story, fortifying the significance of all that transpires. This theme is condensed summarily in Rucker's assessment of death as the price that's paid for living.

The scene in which Will escapes death stimulates the youth's quest for understanding the meaning of life. As he ponders such questions as why do we live? Why are some spared? What role do God and faith have in life?

There is a thematic shift of focus from grief over mortality, to facing life and discovering faith. After his near-death experience Will is deluged by the religious sages of Cold Sassy and endures an unending stream of Presbyterian predestination, Methodist evangelism, and Baptist zeal for service. Later, alone with Grandpa he sorts through his thoughts and receives Rucker's nonsense, pragmatic theology. Will then pursues the



issue of faith that has him most perplexed, "Why did Jesus say that whatever we asked for we'd receive?" As the novel concludes Rucker arrives at the belief that Jesus was not offering to remove the hardships of life but to equip those in need with courage, strength, peace, hope, and forgiveness. Through Rucker, Burns explores the struggles of a sincere seeker attempting to implement authentic faith in daily life.

Throughout this poignant year Will often copes with grief through humor and mischief. Family life, grief, romance, and progress compose a vivid landscape for the youth's excursions into self discovery. *Cold Sassy Tree* captures the world view and spirit of an adolescent boy with realism and insight.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in this book is first person limited. The story is told from the point of view of Will. Will is telling the story eight years later; therefore, the scope is limited both by the fact that only what Will knows does the reader know. It is also limited by the fact that eight years may have diminished some memory, although it doesn't seem to be a problem. The time factor may also be a help because of information that has been relayed to Will throughout the years.

The main focus of Will's story is on the marriage of Miss Love to Grandpa Blakeslee; however, other events are included. The story is told through a mixture of dialogue and exposition.

## Setting

Cold Sassy is set in post civil war Georgia. It is set in a small town that is undergoing many changes because of the place and time. Georgia has recently acquired the technologies of indoor plumbing, electricity and telephones. These haven't reached all in Cold Sassy, but most. One of the only people in town who does not have these is Grandpa Blakeslee.

Cold Sassy sees its first automobile when Hoyt comes home with his Cadillac, and its second when Grandpa orders his Pierce. Technology is slowly changing the way that things are done, but there are still a lot of changes to come.

In Cold Sassy, most still hold a grudge against the Union. This is evident in their conversations and their "Southern Independence Day" Parade. Black people and white people still segregate themselves, and black people are treated as lesser.

Mill people are also treated as lesser to town people. They are forced into a substandard way of living with very little hope for fast change. The first sign of change here, is that much to Will's disapproval, the town school and the mill school have been consolidated to give the mill children a better chance. Hosie and Lightfoot are determined to get out of this way of life and see their chance when Grandpa gives Hosie the job. Women don't have the right to vote, but there are two suffragettes in Cold Sassy at the time.

## Language and Meaning

Cold Sassy is fairly easy to read. There are few words that the average reader won't know. There may be some references that younger generations may not understand without some explanation. For example, when automobiles first came out, to start them,



there was a handle on the outside of the car that one had to crank to start the engine. The book vaguely explains these things, though, making outside resources probably unnecessary.

One thing that some readers may have a problem with is that during the dialog, things are not spelled correctly. They are spelled as they are said. For example, again is often spelled "agin." Most of the words are easy enough to understand, but some may be harder.

## Structure

This novel is made up of fifty chapters. Some chapters may be only a page in length, while others may be closer to ten. The novel is three-hundred and ninety-one pages. This story is not told in strict chronological order. As Will remembers things that he finds relevant to what he is telling at the time, he relays them. For example, in chapter one, the reader finds out that Granny Blakeslee has been dead for three weeks. In later chapter six, Will relays how things were when Granny was about to die.

The story is not in strict chronological order, but it is in semi-chronological order. It brings the reader from the day that his Grandpa Blakeslee announces that he is going to marry the milliner, Miss Love, to just after Grandpa Blakeslee's funeral party. He remembers some things from before then and relates some things from after then, but it is mostly in order.



## Quotes

"I ain't go'n be no burden on y'all. Not ever. Which means I got to hire me a colored woman or git married, one, and tell you the truth, hit's jest cheaper to have a wife." Ch. 2 pg. 6

"According to Temp, the deacons voted to put it in the church records that Mary Willis Blakeslee has swapped her religious birthright for a mess of matrimonial pottage." Ch. 3 pg. 11.

"She was the only child of Granny and Grandpa's to live more than a few years, besides my mother, and she'd been spoiled all her life. I reckon they thought they had to keep rewarding her for not dying." Ch. 2 pg. 12.

"In a few minutes Grandpa was back with a dark red rose in his hand, biting off the thorns and spitting them out as he walked toward the bed. When Granny roused a little he held the rose close to her face. His hand was trembling. He said gruffly, 'Here.'" Ch. 6 pg. 34.

"The house was full of sad people, come to cry and eat and drink tea, and Granny didn't have enough dishes without somebody being in the kitchen to wash each plate and glass as soon as it got set down. If Miss Love had notions about Grandpa that day - the way Miss Effie Belle claimed later - having to use a privy and draw well water and go to the back porch to throw out the dirty dish-water would have been enough to make her think twice." Ch. 8 pg. 41.

"Two or more years ago she was out workin' in her rose garden one mornin' - did you know, boy, she's got over sixty different kind out there? - and she said to me, said, 'Mr. Blakeslee, I wouldn't even mind dyin' if'n I could be buried in a bed of roses.' That's jest the way she put it." Ch. 8 pg. 48.

"To mourn is not the same as to be in mourning, which means wearing a black armband and sitting in the parlor, talking to people who call on the bereaved." Ch.9 pg. 36.

"When Granny passed away herself, I thought how dying was a lot like what happened when the Stokes went to Brazil or when Uncle Buson rode off into the night. Whether you were up meeting God, down in Brazil hating Yankees, or out West somewhere loving a Mexican woman, to those left behind, you had just plain disappeared." Ch. 9 pg. 58.

"Besides losing his appetite and his drum, Grandpa always said the War cost him half his left arm. He claimed a damn yankee shot it off. Granny told me it happened in a sawmill accident after the war. 'But they ain't a bit of use mentionin' that in front of your granddaddy,' she said. 'For on thang, it don't matter. For another, you know how he is. He tells a thang a few times, he believes it hisself. For another, when that-air arm goes



to hurtin' on a cold winter night, it's a comfort to him to cuss the Yankees. A man cain't hardly cuss no sawmill." Ch. 10 Pg. 61.

"Seems like if Love Simpson cain't get him talked about on way, she does it another. Everybody will say she didn't want people thinkin' he's old enough to be her daddy. But he is." Ch. 24 pg. 155.

"Grandpa Tweedy was sitting on the porch swatting flies. His pet hen, a White Leghorn, clicked with excitement every time the swatter came down. I guess I saw him through Pink's eyes that morning, because I was embarrassed all of a sudden, how seedy Grandpa Tweedy looked in ragged overalls, his beard so long and scraggly." Ch.25 pg. 167.

"Eight years after our camping trip, I still can't believe how good a told that tale about Aunt Loma nursing a pig, not to mention the one about sticking a pin in her rubber busts." Ch. 26 pg. 171.

"She said real low, 'He ain't got no bathtub like you.' I hated feeling ashamed for having a bathtub." Ch. 35 pg. 241.

"I was kind of sorry I'd messed up Aunt Loma's Christmas play. Oh, well, heck, if it weren't for my rats, Cold Sassy wouldn't remember that dern play past New Year's. As it was, everybody in town would be talking about it for years to come." Ch. 42 pg. 320.

## Adaptations

In 1986 Faye Dunaway bought the movie rights to *Cold Sassy Tree*. The Turner Network Television production first aired in October of 1989 and was later released for home video. The film stars Faye Dunaway, Richard Widmark, and Neil Patrick Harris. The adaptation is fairly faithful to the original with regard to dialogue and plot, although some liberties are taken with both structural and minor details. Burns was disappointed to discover that the film's rendition of her carefully crafted "down home" dialect was riddled with the inflections and grammar of educated Yankees.

The film version suffers much in its condensation, due largely to poor characterization. In an effort to keep the focus on the romance, this version reduces Will Tweedy's role to a stoic observer, hovering in the background.

Consequently the vitality is drained from the story. Rucker shares the problem of woodenness with Will Tweedy.

In a few scenes, such as the funeral for Camp Williams, Rucker delivers his character with some of the force which permeated his personality in the novel.

However, the film's Rucker Blakeslee lacks the humor and spirit of the original. Rucker's daughter, the beautiful, arrogant, self-centered, little she-devil, Loma Blakeslee Williams comes across on the screen as merely another rude and catty woman in a pompadour. The only character to remain true to the novel in substance and style is Faye Dunaway's Love Simpson. Because a film adaptation must selectively disclose the plot, the film's story line will be weaker than in the novel. For this reason strong, well-drawn characterization is essential for all the principals if the film version is going to capture the soul of the novel. The sweet romance told without the richness of the other central characters and the effervescence of a prominent Will Tweedy results in a saccharine and forgettable portrayal.





## Key Questions

More than a decade after its first publication in 1984, *Cold Sassy Tree*'s popularity continues to grow. Its broad-based appeal has made it a regular selection for book clubs and coteries. Claiming both the territory of a coming-of-age novel and regional fiction it offers a rich range of topics for exploration. The book's thematic treatment of love, death, jealousy, and faith can be utilized to probe the values of yesteryear and those of modern society. The novel lends itself to discussing many aspects of family and marriage.

The dominant theme of love and marriage can be examined through the subthemes of expectations, tolerance, and support of the extended family.

The framework of the extended family itself in *Cold Sassy Tree* shows the value and the impact of transgenerational relationships.

Burns believed that her fiction of small town life contained a universality, demonstrating the networking of individuals, families, groups, races, and institutions in a microcosm. From this arena topics of citizenship, interdependence, social conformity, and prejudice can be broached. As a period novel, the changes in economics, industrialization, and modernization illustrate how people react to change.

Groups may also wish to focus on the use of humor and anecdote in *Cold Sassy Tree* and the role of oral tradition in the story, as well as in the crafting of the story.

1. The family's hired "colored" help was once owned by Miss Mattie Lou's family; the racial interaction shows a mixture of loyalty, friendship, deference, and distance. Does this portrayal seem natural or deliberate?

2. What were the root causes of Camp's despair? Do you think these issues would be less in contemporary society? Would a modern day Camp have handled it differently?

3. Discuss each of the prominent female characters in *Cold Sassy Tree*.

Note their relationship with men, their role in community, and their self-concept. Then explain ways you believe they are shaped by their period, and cite ways they transcend any time frame.

4. What do you believe was Rucker's reason for not modernizing his home?

5. Why is Rucker resistant to the changing of the town name? Comment on his remark "over my dead body."

6. What role did pride play in the story? Could pride play as strong a part in community life today? Discuss the positive and negative aspects.

7. By the end of the story what are Will's feelings for Hosie Roach?



8. Read "A Reminiscence" by Katrina Kenison and comment on the correlation between facing mortality in *Cold Sassy Tree* and Olive Ann Burns's life up to the book's publication in 1984, then near the end of her life in 1989/1990.

9. Do you believe that either Miss Love or Rucker had serious second thoughts about their marriage? If so, at what point?



## Topics for Discussion

Why did Queenie tell Will that she drinks out of a mason jar? Is this the real reason? Discuss.

When Will and Lightfoot McLendon got caught kissing in the graveyard, who did the neighbor hold responsible? Why?

When Love Simpson holds the first women's suffrage meeting in Cold Sassy, only two women attend. Why?

Why did Love Simpson learn to speak proper English? Explain.

Grandpa Blakeslee came up with the idea of playing a practical joke on the United States of America. How did he accomplish this?

What did Mr. McAllister bring to Miss Love? Why didn't Grandpa Blakeslee let her take it back to the hotel?

Miss Love married Grandpa Blakeslee for two main reasons. What were they?

Will thought that if Grandpa hired Hosie, he wouldn't be replacing Uncle Camp. Why did he think this?

## Literary Precedents

Will Tweedy is said by critics to be a creation reminiscent of Mark Twain's Huck Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1854) and Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Tweedy's fourteen-year-old eyes render a portrait of life that is as honest as it playful. As the tumultuous year of 1906 unfolds, Will Tweedy encounters such complex issues as death, prejudice and love. Yet the course of the journey is kept lively and engaging due in large part to the charm and vigor of young Tweedy.

Like a Twain character, Will moves deftly from shenanigan to social quandary without missing a beat.

## Related Titles

With the unexpected popularity of the novel came floods of mail to Olive Ann Burns requesting a sequel to *Cold Sassy Tree*. In 1987 she underwent a second round of chemotherapy which led to congestive heart failure and more than a year of complete bed rest.

In February 1988 with the assistance of a Dictaphone and her neighbor/secretary Norma Duncan she began the sequel with the planned title *Time, Dirt and Money*. Her father, William Arnold Burns, had been her model for Will Tweedy in *Cold Sassy Tree*, and *Time, Dirt, and Money* was to be the saga of her parents' life and marriage during the Depression. The book was unfinished at the time of her death, July 4, 1990.

Her dedicated editor at Ticknor & Fields, Katrina Kenison, assembled the early chapters which Olive Burns had completed and supplemented these with Burns's notes. Kenison then wrote a reminiscence of Olive Ann Burns which together with the material for *Time, Dirt, and Money* comprise *Leaving Cold Sassy* (the unfinished sequel to *Cold Sassy Tree*) published in 1992 by Ticknor & Fields.

In *Leaving Cold Sassy* Burns had desired to show what one critic called the "interior limbo of a marriage . . . the adult experience of disappointment and despair." The tone, theme, and construction varies dramatically from *Cold Sassy Tree*, but a work so abruptly terminated does not bear too close of scrutiny. It is clear that Burns's intent was not to write another *Cold Sassy Tree*, but to capture the innerscape of a marriage under duress.



# Copyright Information

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