

# **Out to Canaan Study Guide**

**Out to Canaan by Jan Karon**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Out to Canaan Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1-2.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 3-5.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 6-8.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9-11.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 12-15.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 16-18.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter 19.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 20-21.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>



## Plot Summary

Out to Canaan is the third book in Jan Karon's Mitford series. In this novel, Father Tim has been married for two years to his neighbor, Cynthia. His house is overflowing with family and friends, including Harley, who has moved into the apartment in the basement of the rectory. On top of this, Father Tim has his regular church duties, is trying to help Esther Cunningham win a ninth term as mayor, and is struggling to do right by Miss Sadie by making sure the sale of her ancestral home, Fernbank, is handled with care. Out to Canaan is novel that is supposed to be taking the beloved character of Father Tim to retirement, but makes it clear that a good man's works are never done.

Father Tim faces spring with the unpleasant duty of having to tell his practically adopted son that he cannot spend the summer at Meadowgate as he had hoped. Instead, Father Tim must find him a job in Mitford while also helping his wife hostess a tea at their home, make a decision about the decaying roof at Fernbank, and prepare for his retirement in a year and a half. At the same time, Father Tim learns that Mack Stroupe, a neighbor and hot dog vendor, is running against Esther Cunningham for mayor.

Father Tim brings Dooley home and instantly discovers that his fourteen-year-old son is now interested in both cars and girls. Now Father Tim finds himself in the awkward position of talking to the boy about sex while putting off the inevitable driving lessons. While trying to decide what to do about that, Lace, a girl from the Creek that Father Tim has placed with a local family, brings him Harley, her friend who is suffering from a bleeding ulcer. Father Tim gives Harley a place to stay in the rectory, adding to the already overflowing rooms at the rectory.

Miss Sadie left Father Tim and his church Fernbank when she died, leaving the church with the decision over whether or not to shell out the money for the house's upkeep or to sell it as is. When a real estate company out of Florida, Miami Development, offers to buy the house, the church is ecstatic. However, Father Tim is hesitant to watch Miss Sadie's beloved Fernbank turned into a spa. Father Tim puts off the sale as long as he can, demanding thirty days to think the offer over. At the last minute, Father Tim's friend, Andrew, calls from Italy and makes an offer on Fernbank in which he is willing to pay the asking price, more than a hundred thousand dollars more than Miami Development is offering.

As the mayoral campaign becomes heated, causing the mayor to call Father Tim many times for ideas on how to promote herself as mayor, Father Tim announces his impending retirement to his congregation. Many take this announcement badly, avoiding Father Tim on the street or crying at the sight of him. Father Tim begins to have second thoughts, but he has already promised his devoted wife he will retire and dedicate his time to her.

Winnie Ivy, owner of Sweet Stuff Bakery, decides to sell her bakery and move to Tennessee with her brother, Joe. However, by the time Winnie gets an offer on the bakery, she has already decided that she does not want to move. When the buyer offers



to allow Winnie to remain at the bakery and run it for them, Winnie agrees. However, by this time Father Tim has figured out that Edith Mallory, an old enemy, is behind the company making the offer. Father Tim helps Winnie back out of the deal and keep her business intact.

Father Tim keeps his mouth shut regarding the fact that Edith Mallory is also behind Mack Stroupe's bid at mayor and nearly regrets it when the election ends in a tie, forcing a coin toss to make the choice. However, it all ends well when Esther wins. It seems everything is falling into place for Father Tim, including finding one of Pauline Barlowe's missing three children. However, alcohol is still a demon for poor Pauline, as well as her new beau Buck Leeper, giving Father Tim something else to focus on even as he finds peace and contentment as Christmas Eve arrives in Mitford.



# Chapters 1-2

## Chapters 1-2 Summary

Mitford is a fictional town in North Carolina where Father Tim has been the rector at Lord's Chapel for sixteen years. Recently married, Father Tim is finding his life more hectic than ever even as he plans for his coming retirement.

**A Tea and a Half.** A freeze comes to Mitford just as it looked like spring had arrived, causing some disgruntlement among the townspeople. At the rectory, Father Tim finds his wife distracted by plans for the Primrose Tea, a traditional party she is expected to throw each year. As part of this, Cynthia wants Father Tim to move her armoire from the guest room to their bedroom. During the tea, Father Tim helps park cars. Mack Stroupe, a local man who is not well liked, drives his new truck repeatedly through the traffic to promote his new campaign to become mayor. The tea goes well, leaving Cynthia pleased but exhausted at the end of the day. That night they receive a call from Dooley, the boy Father Tim took custody of several years ago while his mother struggled with alcoholism. Dooley is due to come home from boarding school in a few weeks, but he plans to spend the summer at Meadowgate with the local vet, learning his profession. Unfortunately, Father Tim gets a call a few days later letting him know that the vet cannot host Dooley that summer.

**Step by Step.** Father Tim and the church have inherited Miss Sadie's ancestral home, Fernbank. The church vestry must make the decision whether or not to have the roof fixed before attempting to sell the house to benefit Hope House, Miss Sadie's project for elderly people. The roof will cause the church a lot of money, but there does not seem to be any interest in its sale, either. At the same time, Father Tim finds himself concerned with Pauline Barlowe, Dooley's mother, who was recently burned and is now straightening out her life in the home of a friend. Father Tim wants to help Pauline find her three children whom she gave away while in the throes of her alcoholism. However, Pauline is reluctant to talk about it. Father Tim has breakfast with some locals at The Grill and learns that Joe, his barber, is moving to Tennessee to be near siblings and that his sister, Winnie, who owns the Sweet Stuff Bakery, is thinking of moving as well. Father Tim finds himself stuck with the unpleasant job of telling Dooley he cannot spend the summer at Meadowgate, giving himself yet another task to add to his list, finding Dooley a summer job. On top of all his duties, Father Tim finds himself coming home to a full house, especially when Puny, his housekeeper, has her twins with her. Father Tim tries to find some peace in wedding the flower beds, a much needed rest after learning there might be a buyer for Fernbank.

## Chapters 1-2 Analysis

These early chapters introduce Mitford as the setting of the novel, introducing her population and her much loved rector, Father Tim. Father Tim is a very busy man,



finding himself not only dealing with church duties, but helping his wife plan a tea, worrying over the ancestral home of a deceased friend, and working to find a job for his son, Dooley. Father Tim has a full life, a life that is devoted not only to God, but to the people of Mitford. Father Tim has lived here for sixteen years and has become an integral part of the community, making his counsel not only expected, but necessary to everyone from the mayor to the recovering alcoholic from the community known as the Creek.

These early chapters also present the situations that are going to keep Father Tim busy throughout the novel. The first situation is the possible sale of Miss Sadie's Fernbank. Fernbank was left to the church, but Father Tim was charged purposely with being gentle with the property. Father Tim takes this request to heart, promising his deceased friend that he will do the best he can, but with no clue how to do it. Father Tim must also find a job for his son to occupy him after his hope of going to Meadowgate is dashed. Father Tim also finds himself advising the mayor in light of competition to her office. On top of all this, Father Tim has promised his wife that he will retire in eighteen months. This leaves Father Tim with a full plate, suggesting to the reader that Father Tim will have a difficult time dealing with each of these situations.



# Chapters 3-5

## Chapters 3-5 Summary

Eden. Father Tim hears gossip that Mack Stroupe is spending a great deal of money around town, painting his house and having his wife's hair done. At the same time, Father Tim visits Winnie Ivy to learn if she really is planning on selling Sweet Stuff Bakery. Winnie tells him she wants to be nearer to family, even though he insists that Mitford is her family. Winnie also asks Father Tim to help her write a short paragraph about a brand of flour in order to win a free cruise. Back at the office, Father Tim gets a call from Olivia Harper, the woman he placed Lace Turner, a girl from the Creek, with. It turns out Lace is spending a lot of time in the Creek area at the home of a friend who is sick. Father Tim agrees to go check it out and learns that Harley Welch, Lace's friend, is very sick. Father Tim helps her get advice on what might be wrong with Harley and then he agrees to allow Harley to stay at the rectory until he recovers his health. Lace comes to visit Harley daily, helping Cynthia prepare liquid meals that he can eat. Father Tim also sits with him daily and learns he is an accomplished mechanic who once worked for a race car driver. At the same time, rumors continue to spread about Mack Stroupe and regarding the development company interested in Fernbank.

A Full House. Father Tim visits the home of Betty Craig and speaks with Pauline Barlowe about her daughter, Jessie, one of the children she gave away in the throes of her alcoholism. Pauline does not like to talk about it, but believes her cousin Rhody took little Jessie. On his walk home, Father Tim finds a job for Dooley at The Local, the local grocery store. Father Tim comes home to find both Olivia and Lace there, helping with Harley's care. The following day, Father Tim arrives at his office to hear yet more gossip about Mack Stroupe, including the fact that he has put up a billboard outside of town. Dooley comes home and is unhappy to discover Lace has taken up residence in the house. Dooley is still unhappy about missing out on a summer at Meadowgate, but happy to have a summer job with his friend Tommy. That weekend, Father Tim, Cynthia, and Dooley go out to Meadowgate for dinner where Dooley shows off his knowledge in veterinarian medicine. Back at home, a local girl, Jenny, comes to visit Dooley, a warning to Father Tim that a new interest is developing in his teenage son. Finally, Father Tim drives Harley's truck into town to have the oil changed and discovers Harley's mechanical prowess when he is nearly pulled over for speeding.

Out to Canaan. Father Tim walks with Scott Murphy, the director of Hope House, and gets an update on the center. Father Tim also discusses with Scott Murphy creating a mission in the Creek and learns that several men have already begun coming to him for religious services, creating a small congregation. Father Tim learns from Scott that Hope House has lost its dining room manager. Father Tim immediately thinks of Pauline Barstowe, but just as he arrives to tell her, Dooley arrives with the same news. Father Tim drives Pauline to Hope House and waits while she has her interview, praying she will get the job. At home that night, Father Tim catches Dooley revving the engine in his car. Dooley has a friend whose father is allowing him to learn to drive already and



Dooley wants to learn as well. That night, Lace takes Father Tim downstairs and asks him if they could fix it up and allow Harley to live there. Father Tim agrees and talks Cynthia into it. In a week, Bishop Stuart Cullen, an old friend of Father Tim's, will come to Lord's Chapel and announce Father Tim's retirement. Father Tim wants to get a haircut, but Joe has left town and he cannot get an appointment at the only other salon in town. Father Tim expects the town to be upset by his leaving, so he is surprised by the mild reaction he gets.

## Chapters 3-5 Analysis

Father Tim's visit to Winnie Ivy has two purposes. First, it introduces to the reader Father Tim's unhappiness at seeing her leave town and the possibility that he might attempt to talk her out of it, or have some other role in the sale of her shop. The second is that Father Tim helps her fill out a contest form for a fee cruise, suggesting that this cruise might play a role in her future. In the same chapter, Father Tim shows his compassion when he allows Lace Turner to move Harley Welch, a Creek mechanic, into his home. In a later chapter, Father Tim will even agree to allow Harley to move into an apartment in his basement, causing his already overflowing house to become even more crowded, changing the dynamics of what was once a bachelor's home and is now in every way a family residence.

Dooley returns home, adding to the dynamics in the rectory, ready to learn to drive although he is only fourteen, and with a new interest in girls. The return of his son pushes Father Tim to think about his three siblings who are still missing after their mother gave them away in the throes of her alcoholism. Father Tim attempts to ask Pauline about Jessie, the baby girl, and learns she might be with a cousin Rhody, giving Father Tim something to look into. At the same time, Pauline applies for a job, taking another step to clean up her life. Finally, Father Tim is disappointed that his congregation is not upset at the announcement that he is retiring, adding some tension to the plot.





# Chapters 6-8

## Chapters 6-8 Summary

**A Small Boom.** Father Tim finds himself wondering what Mack Stroupe's motivations are for running for mayor as he drives past one of his billboards. At home, Harley and Lace are busy fixing up the basement apartment, smelling the house up with paint. At work, Father Tim has to show a group of people from Miami Development around Fernbank. They might want to purchase the house in order to turn it and its grounds into a first class spa. As they walk through, Father Tim finds himself become more and more uncomfortable with the idea of these people buying the house as they continuously point out its flaws. The representatives from Miami Development tell Father Tim they will get back to him in a few weeks. Later, Father Tim learns that Pauline got the job at Hope House. Cynthia decides to throw a party to celebrate Harley moving in. Later that day, Father Tim runs into a couple of townspeople who turn and walk the other way when they see him coming. Back at the house, Father Tim realizes he needs another trim, but does still cannot get in at the salon. Father Tim allows Harley to cut his hair, but he does such a bad job that both Cynthia and Dooley feel the need to fix it.

**Housewarming.** After the party, Lace becomes upset because she cannot find her ugly hat. Lace accuses Dooley of stealing it and takes a swing at him. Father Tim and Olivia break up the fight. Later that night, Father Tim asks Dooley if he took the hat and he admits he did. Father Tim insists he go apologize to Lace the following day. The next day, the mayor calls Father Tim to her office and tells him that Mack Stroupe is going to have a barbecue during the town festival and insists that Father Tim come up with something better for her campaign. Father Tim looks at his hair in the mirror later that day and decides he better go to the salon. Father Tim lucks out and catches Fancy at the salon on her day off. Father Tim allows her to cut his hair and then lets her talk him into a facial. When Father Tim gets home, however, he discovers that his face is green. That night is Father Tim's birthday, so he makes a nice meal for his wife and they spend the evening alone together, with his green face and all. The next day, Father Tim finds himself counting his blessings even as he dreams about Pauline's missing daughter, Jessie.

**Political Barbecue.** Father Tim is up early the morning of the town festival to have breakfast with his friends. Before going to the diner, Father Tim talks to Winnie, who is beginning to rethink her decision to sell her bakery. Winnie tells Father Tim that she dreams of a dark haired man who will work with her in the kitchen. Over breakfast, Father Tim learns that Omer has broken his foot, making Father Tim nervous about Omer's role in Father Tim's plan to boost Esther's campaign. However, Omer's injury does not impede the stunt Father Tim has come up with. A smoke plan flies over the festival just as Mack's barbecue is beginning and writes out Esther's campaign slogan, Mitford Takes Care of its Own. Then a couple of stunt planes fly over before a plane flies over with Esther's new slogan on its banner, Esther, Right for Mitford, Right for Mayor.



## Chapters 6-8 Analysis

Father Tim is finding himself being pulled deeper and deeper into the mayoral race. Father Tim is unclear on Mack Stroupe's motivations and worries that Mack is not what is best for Mitford. However, Father Tim is a religious man who does not believe in spreading gossip about people, so he does not share his opinion with others. However, he does help Esther with her campaign, arranging an aerial show that makes Mack's barbecue look boring. At the same time, Father Tim finds himself torn about the sale of Fernbank. Father Tim was close to Miss Sadie, the last owner of the house, and he has promised her to be gentle with the house as she requested in her will. Father Tim's instincts tell him that the prospective buyer, Miami Development, is not what Miss Sadie would have wanted, but Father Tim also has to keep in mind that the church cannot afford to pay the upkeep of the house.

Harley fixes up the basement apartment at the rectory and moves in. Lace is at the house continuously because of her friendship with Harley, causing some unpleasantness for Dooley who insists he dislikes Lace. Dooley even hides her special hat, an ugly hat that she insists on wearing. This suggests to the reader that Dooley has deeper feelings for Lace than he previously admitted to. Father Tim now has a full house at the rectory, a home that will not be his in a little more than a year, foreshadowing a time when Father Tim will have to find new housing for all his houseguests.



# Chapters 9-11

## Chapters 9-11 Summary

**Life in the Fast Lane.** In exchange for living in the basement apartment, Harley has repaired both Father Tim and Cynthia's cars, giving Father Tim's old Buick more horsepower. At his office, Father Tim gets a letter from an old congregant that his secretary found on the Internet for him. After work, Father Tim takes Dooley over to Betty's house to tear down an old shed. Afterward, Father Tim talks to Pauline about Jessie again, walking away satisfied that she could care for the child if they were to find her. The following day, Father Tim learns that Buck Leeper, a construction supervisor he worked with on Hope House, is available to come to Mitford to work on the construction of new Sunday school classrooms in the attic of Lord's Chapel. Father Tim also gets a phone call from the representative of Miami Development letting him know they are still interested in Fernbank. Finally, Father Tim talks with Esther Bolick, who is having a hard time with the planning of the Bane and Blessing charity sale. That afternoon, Father Tim meets with Cynthia and Andrew, a local antiques dealer, at Fernbank to arrange for the sale of the furniture. Andres loves the place and buys nearly all the furniture. While they are there, Cynthia and Father Tim pick something from the attic for themselves, as Miss Sadie told them to do in her will. That night, Cynthia begins planning a dinner party and suggests that she and Father Tim take a few days off the following week.

**Those Who are Able.** Father Tim sees Dooley pulling Harley's truck in and out of the driveway, adding to his list of things to deal with later. Father Tim goes the following day to invite Louella to Cynthia's dinner party. She agrees if only he will have Amazing Grace played at that Sunday's church service. Father Tim goes by to check on Pauline too and finds she is doing well in her new job. At work, Father Tim learns that his secretary has found an address for Pauline's cousin Rhody. Father Tim tells his wife that instead of going on their retreat, he wants to drive to Florida to get Jessie. Cynthia, Father Tim, and Pauline all make the drive to Florida. At the house, whose address Father Tim got for Rhody, Father Tim leaves the women in the car and knocks on the door. Jessie comes to the window, but refuses to open the door. Father Tim finally gets her to open the door and she tells him Rhody cannot come to the door. Father Tim has Jessie direct him to Rhody, whom he finds in bed with a gangrene foot. Father Tim takes her to the hospital before making the return trip to North Carolina with Jessie safely in the backseat with her mother.

**Amazing Grace.** Dooley meets his sister Jessie, for the first time since she was two. The following day at church services, Louella sings Amazing Grace as part of the sermon. At breakfast the following morning, Father Tim continues looking for people willing to play softball on his team that will play against Scott's Hope House team. Miami Development comes back with an offer on Fernbank that is one hundred thousand dollars less than they were hoping for. The representative spends the majority of a meeting with the vestry pointing out the repairs that will be needed at Fernbank to justify the low bid. Father Tim insists that the church be given thirty days to think the offer over.



Cynthia makes Father Tim move the dining room table into the kitchen for the dinner party. The next morning, Father Tim learns Winnie has gotten a buyer for her bakery. That night, Father Tim finds himself promising Dooley a driving lesson. At the dinner party, everyone is just sitting down to eat when Buck Leeper arrives. Father Tim has forgotten to get him a place to stay, so he offers him the guest room.

## Chapters 9-11 Analysis

Father Tim has given Harley a purpose by allowing him to fix his cars. Father Tim is also spreading the word about his talents, getting Harley work from other people as well, helping the man get back on his feet in ways that go beyond a place to live. This shows the reader how kind Father Tim is and how helping someone regain their self respect can help set them on the path of self reliance. It is the same thing Father Tim is doing with Pauline. In fact, Father Tim has found Jessie, Pauline's young daughter whom she allowed to disappear with a cousin while she was drinking heavily. Jessie is home now and Father Tim's quick action might also have saved the cousin's life. Again, this shows how compassionate and caring Father Tim is.

Father Tim continues to worry about the mayoral race even as he finds himself doubting the sale of Fernbank. However, there are no other alternatives to the sale of Fernbank to the Miami Development Company, but Father Tim continues to delay the sale in the hopes that something else might happen, suggesting to the reader that something might come up that will keep Fernbank from being turned into a spa, changing the landscape of Mitford irrevocably. Father Tim has also learned that Winnie might have a buyer for Sweet Stuff Bakery, again changing the Mitford Father Tim has grown to love. Perhaps this too might change with Father Tim's help, but the reader is unclear at this point how. Finally, Buck Leeper has returned. Those readers who have read previous Mitford novels recall that Buck Leeper is a violent alcoholic who had something of an alcohol-induced psychotic break in Father Tim's presence. Buck is back and he is showing interest in Pauline, a situation that could threaten her sobriety.



# Chapters 12-15

## Chapters 12-15 Summary

Waiting. Father Tim talks to Dooley about sex and learns the boy knows more than he does. Father Tim continues to look for players for the baseball team. While jogging in order to prepare for the game, Father Tim sees the same black car he saw a few weeks back in the middle of the night. Father Tim sees the driver meet with a pickup truck, suggesting something unsettling. Father Tim stops into Andrew's antiques shop later that day and buys a lap desk for Cynthia's birthday. At Sweet Stuff, Father Tim learns that Winnie is rethinking her desire to move. Everyone in town is talking about the Fernbank sale, giving credit to Mack Stroupe for bringing Miami Development in. Father Tim asks Harley to give Dooley his driving lessons. The day care opens at Lord's Chapel. Father Tim suggests to Puny that she begin taking the twins there so she can get her work done in peace. On Cynthia's birthday, she and Father Tim hide in their bedroom and share the evening alone together. The following day, Father Tim watches Dooley and Harley leave for their driving lesson. Father Tim tries not to worry, just like he has been trying not to worry about Fernbank, but finds it difficult. Father Tim talks with Cynthia as they wait for Dooley to return, and talks her into renting her house to Buck and she talks him into allowing women on the baseball team. Harley comes home, late, and tells Father Tim that Dooley crashed his truck attempting to avoid a cow in the road.

The Fields are White. Father Tim dreams of his old nemesis Edith Mallory. Later, Father Tim shows Buck around Cynthia's little yellow house and tells him of the renovations they hope to do before his retirement date. Buck agrees to find a crew to do it for him. There is an article in the paper that morning quoting Mack Stroupe as taking credit for the sale of Fernbank, making Father Tim uneasy with the assumption that the sale will go through. A friend of Miss Sadie's, Absalom, is dying. Father Tim goes to be with him in his final moments. Taking a drive afterward to clear his head, Father Tim sees a black car. The driver is Edith Mallory's chauffeur, causing Father Tim to wonder if Edith Mallory might not be the mysterious benefactor behind Mack Stroupe's campaign. To find out for sure, Father Tim has Omer take him flying over Edith Mallory's isolated house. Father Tim sees Edith and Mack talking in the back yard. At his house, Lace shows some jealousy when Dooley's girlfriend, Jenny, comes by the rectory, causing Cynthia to scold her for lying.

Play Ball. It is the day of the baseball game. All goes well and the Lord's Chapel team wins thanks to Buck's good coaching and a good hit by Adele Hogan. The Hope House residents enjoy the game, especially one man who is reminded of himself as a child when he sees Dooley play.

Day into Night. A meeting is held with the vestry to finalize the sale of Fernbank. Father Tim is there reluctantly, not happy with the sale. Just as they are about to sign the contracts, Father Tim takes a call from Andrew, offering the asking price on the house,



as is. Father Tim is beyond himself with happiness. Father Tim holds a special church service that night to offer thanks. The attic job at Lord's Chapel has become everyone's lunch time diversion. Father Tim worries about the mayoral election, unable to decide if he should let people know who is really behind Mack's campaign. At the same time, Father Tim learns Buck has been seeing a lot of Pauline and finds himself concerned about her sobriety. Later, Father Tim meets with one of the vestry and learns that H. Tide has made a bid on the rectory and chances are good they will want to occupy it before Father Tim retires, forcing him to find temporary housing for himself, his family, and Harley.

## Chapters 12-15 Analysis

Even as Father Tim tries to keep his nose out of the mayoral race, he seems to continuously find himself pulled in. Father Tim has never felt right about Mack's campaign, but when he recognizes Edith Mallory's chauffeur in the black car he has seen driving all the back roads of Mitford in a suspicious fashion, he decides to check the connection out. Sure enough, Father Tim sees Mack meeting with Edith in her backyard. Father Tim knows this is not good because he has had difficult dealings with Edith in the past, leaving him convinced that Edith will only bring big change to Mitford, which will not be good for its residents. However, Father Tim is a man of integrity who will not spread rumors even if they are based in fact, so he is unsure if he should tell anyone.

At the same time, Father Tim has been concerned with the sale of Fernbank. At the last minute, all of Father Tim's prayers appear to be answered when Andrew, the antiques dealer, makes an offer on the house for the full asking price. This fixes all of Father Tim's concerns and keeps the property from being turned into a spa. However, the same company that wants to buy Sweet Stuff bakery now wants the rectory, suggesting that Father Tim, his family, and Harley will be without a home in a few months, instead of waiting until Father Tim's retirement in a year. This places Father Tim in another difficult position and leaves the reader wondering who H. Tide is and why they want so many properties in a little town like Mitford.



# Chapters 16-18

## Chapters 16-18 Summary

**Bookends.** Father Tim takes Dooley with him to breakfast at the Grill. Later that day, Father Tim learns there is a definite deal in the works with H. Tide. Father Tim goes home to tell Cynthia and she becomes irate on Father Tim's behalf. Father Tim finds himself thinking of the money he inherited from his mother, which is a little more than one hundred thousand. Still worried about his housing situation, Father Tim goes to Sweet Stuff for a napoleon, despite his diabetes. Winnie tells Father Tim that she has been offered nearly half her asking price, but that this company is the first to show interest. Father Tim urges her to wait thirty days to make a decision. Dooley comes to the office to bring Father Tim a letter from Cynthia. Dooley tells Father Tim that Jenny is mad at him, so he has been helping Lace with a story she is writing. On the same day Father Tim learns H. Tide has made a definite offer on his house, Winnie tells him she won the cruise he helped her write the contest entry for.

**Deep Blue Sea.** Father Tim goes home to help Dooley pack for school. Father Tim falls asleep and wakes to the sound of a car hitting his dog, Barnabas. Father Tim runs out to the street and finds Dooley already taking control of the situation. Father Tim goes to get blankets and towels, as well as enlisting Lace's help. They manage to get Barnabas into Harley's truck and drive him to Meadowgate. Hal stitches up Barnabas's chest wound and sets his leg, telling Father Tim he will have to remain in the hospital for a couple of weeks to avoid infection. The following day Father Tim drives a reluctant Dooley to school. At the Grill a few days later, Father Tim learns that Velma is going on the cruise with Winnie and that several people in town have taken out ads in the paper in support of Esther. Father Tim decides to run one as well, but anonymously. On Saturday night, Father Tim is sitting outside Ron Malcolm's house to make an offer on the rectory himself.

**A Cup of Kindness.** A storm hits Mitford, bringing with it cooler weather. Father Tim and Cynthia are sitting in the kitchen listening to Lace quiz Harley on her history lessons when they hear laughter from the little yellow house. Father Tim goes over and finds Pauline drunk. Father Tim helps her clean herself up and takes her home. When he gets home, Father Tim learns that Esther Bolick, the Bane and Blessing organizer, fell from a ladder and broke a bone in each arm and her jaw. The food committee is hysterical because they need to bake a dozen of Esther's orange marmalade cakes, but she is the only one who knows the recipe. The next morning, Father Tim goes to talk to Buck and receives an apology for Pauline's drinking. Buck insists it was his fault. Father Tim suggests that Buck turn to God for his own healing, but Buck refuses. The Bane and Blessing goes off well despite Esther's accident and raises more money than it has in the past. The following day, Father Tim learns that Andrew is back and he meets him out at Fernbank to discover he has married a distant Italian cousin.





## Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Father Tim discovers that the rectory, which he had known would be sold after his retirement, will be sold early. Father Tim, his family, and Harley will all be out of a home in a few weeks. Father Tim is unhappy with this realization and decides to buy the house himself, using it as a rental property after he retires. This reveals to the reader again Father Tim's compassion as well as his love of this house where he has lived for more than sixteen years. It also shows Father Tim's business side, including the fact that he is good with money and able to save the inheritance he got from his mother many years before. At the same time, Winnie continues to struggle with her decision to sell her bakery and move to Tennessee with her siblings. Winnie is coming close to making the decision not to move, but is excited about the idea of selling even though she is not getting what she should for the business.

The Bane and Blessing goes off very well, despite the accident that causes the organizer to spend the day in the hospital, taking one more thing off of Father Tim's shoulders. However, adding to his stress, Barnabas, his large, affectionate dog, has been hit by a car. Dooley shows his maturity when he helps care for the injured dog, despite his own guilt and grief over the accident. Dooley is maturing into a strong young man. Father Tim admires this show of maturity and thinks of telling him about a large inheritance he will receive in the future, but decides against it, suggesting this is a subject that will come up in a later novel in the series.





# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Fernbank. Father Tim shows Andrew, his new bride, and his new brother-in-law around Fernbank, pleased with the reactions he receives. Andrew tells him how he met his new wife and her brother in a restaurant they ran in the village where he was buying antiques. Andrew has bought Fernbank with both the intention of living in it and opening a small Italian restaurant his wife and brother-in-law will run, making Father Tim happy with his decisions. Later, Father Tim returns home with a check for fifteen thousand dollars in his pocket, a refund on the price of the rectory. Bishop Stuart Cullen comes for a visit. Father Tim tells him what he knows about Mack's campaign and asks what he should do. Stuart advises him to keep the information to himself.

At Sweet Stuff, Winnie tells Father Tim that she has signed a contract with H. Tide that will keep her on as manager when the bakery is sold. Winnie asks Father Tim to take the contract home with him in order to review it for her. At home, Lace sees the name H. Tide and tells him it is Edith spelled backwards. Father Tim makes a few phone calls and learns that H. Tide and Miami Development are both owned by Edith Mallory. The next day, Father Tim takes Winnie to speak with Percy at the Grill so he can tell her what it is like to have Edith Mallory as a boss. Winnie calls H. Tide and withdraws the contract. A few days later, Winnie goes on her cruise. When Winnie returns, Father Tim discovers she has found herself a dark haired man and brought him home with her. Thomas Kendall is a pastry chef who has worked cruise ships for fifteen years and is ready to start something new.

The following day is Election Day. Father Tim goes to the Cunningham's for barbecue and to await the results. Father Tim brings Harley so he can talk to the Cunningham's about fixing their RV. At nine o'clock the results come in. Esther announces that Mack Stroupe has won the election.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Father Tim learns that Winnie has agreed to sell the bakery but stay on as manager. Father Tim takes the contract home, strangely depressed by the whole thing, until Lace looks at the name of the real estate company, H. Tide, and announces that it is Edith spelled backwards. This sends Father Tim off on a mission to find out the truth, which he ultimately does. It turns out that Edith owns both the real estate companies that have been trying to buy up property in Mitford, including Fernbank and the rectory. Add to this that Edith Mallory has also been backing Mack for mayor, it causes the reader to believe that Edith is attempting to use her money and business savvy to take over Mitford, perhaps in an attempt to get back at Father Tim for not returning her affection and for coming between her and more rent from Percy at the Grill.



The mayoral election has been something of a subplot throughout the novel that has suddenly become the main focus of the novel. Father Tim has backed Esther Cunningham from the beginning, as did most of the town for the better part of the campaign. Father Tim also is the only one who knows where Mack is getting all his money, but has elected as a man of the cloth to keep his mouth shut. In the end, it seems that this has backfired and Mack has won the election. This news leaves the reader speechless, imagining Edith Mallory taking control of the town council through Mack. This foreshadows a dark time for Mitford.



# Chapters 20-21

## Chapters 20-21 Summary

New Every Morning. Esther goes on to explain that Mack won by one vote. Esther immediately calls the Board of Elections and requests a recount. The following day, Father Tim is walking past Sweet Stuff when Winnie asks him to come inside. Thomas Kendall has proposed to Winnie and he wants Father Tim's permission. Father Tim gives it happily. Later, Father Tim goes to city hall to wait with everyone else for the results of the recount. It comes out to be a tie, so the Election Board flips a coin, as it states they should in the town by-laws. The weeks pass and soon Thanksgiving has come and gone, moving them toward Christmas. Cynthia and Father Tim commit themselves to host dinner parties and to buy gifts for everyone, as well as planning the church services. Father Tim learns his barber, Joe Ivy, is moving back from Tennessee, making him very happy since he has not had his hair cut in months. A few days before Christmas Eve Father Tim is babysitting Jessie when Buck stops by to say goodbye before leaving for the next job. Jessie is heartbroken to see him go. Early in the morning, Father Tim stops by to visit the mayor and catches Esther Cunningham eating one of the biscuits she promised to give up if she won the coin toss. On Christmas Eve, Father Tim finds himself thinking of his mother as Cynthia plans their Christmas morning. Just as he is settling down to a good rest, Cynthia asks Father Tim to run to the store. Father Tim gathers his things and invites Dooley and Harley to go along. They are walking out the door when Buck arrives on their doorstep.

Lion and Lamb. Father Tim takes Buck into his study and listens to him ask for helping kicking his drinking problem. Father Tim leads him in prayer and instructs him to keep his heart open to God to get the help he needs. Father Tim then invites Buck to join him, Harley, and Dooley on their trip to the store. Father Tim allows Dooley to drive. They drive past the homes of friends, stopping for a moment outside Pauline's new house. After Pauline goes inside, Buck asks if he might go and visit her for a few minutes. Father Tim and Dooley both give him their blessing before continuing on their way. Dooley drives them carefully through a softly falling snow, to the store and past Fernbank, before heading home. Father Tim is deeply contented with his life on that Christmas Eve.

## Chapters 20-21 Analysis

Esther Cunningham requests a recount of the ballots and learns that she and Mack have tied. A coin toss determines the winner. The writer does not tell the reader right away who has won, preferring to keep it secret for a time. However, it is soon revealed that Esther Cunningham has won, returning Mitford back to where it was before the election. At the same time, Father Tim learns that Winnie is not only staying in Mitford, but that she and Thomas are getting married, bringing their story to a happy ending. Not

only this, but Joe, Winnie's brother, is returning to Mitford as well. Now Father Tim can get a good haircut again, taking yet another weight off his shoulders.

Buck Leeper is depressed about losing out with Pauline because of his drinking, but he is not motivated enough to do anything about it, preferring to hide behind his guilt and his inability to stop drinking. However, when Buck leaves Mitford, he cannot stop thinking about Pauline and the kids. This brings him back to Father Tim and to asking for help. Father Tim gives him religious guidance which he hopes will help Buck find the right path in his life. This foreshadows a struggle for Buck, suggesting to the reader they might see him again in another novel in the Mitford series.

Finally, Father Tim goes for a ride on a perfect Christmas Eve with his son and his friend. As Father Tim rides through town and sees Mitford through the thin veil of snow, he feels contented that everything is as it should be. Father Tim has found happiness.



# Characters

## Father Timothy Kavanagh

Father Timothy Kavanagh is an Episcopal priest who has recently gotten married. Father Tim also has custody of a teenage boy whose mother is an alcoholic. Father Tim's life is very busy because of his commitment to helping everyone in his congregation, as well as a few who are not. Father Tim is a kind, religious man who spends every day trying to do what is right in the eyes of God. This includes organizing fund raisers, advising townspeople on major decisions, and caring for his wife and child. It also means caring for himself, especially in light of his diabetic condition that causes him to watch closely the food he eats every day. This is a difficult situation for Father Tim because he is good friends with the local baker and often goes to her shop to share in the pastries she bakes.

Father Tim is a man who makes decisions based on instinct. Father Tim becomes aware that something is wrong with the mayoral election that is going on in his town. Father Tim wants to interfere, to warn the townspeople that someone rich and powerful is behind the election, but is encouraged by his bishop to keep his mouth shut. Father Tim also finds himself struggling with the church's possession of Fernbank, the ancestral home of his deceased friend, Miss Sadie. A large development company wants to buy the house, but thankfully a local man comes through with the money to buy the house at the last minute. Rather than turn the property into a spa, the house is to be a family home and small restaurant.

While trying to help his friends and congregation make good decisions in their own lives, Father Tim is also struggling with his own decision to retire. Father Tim learns that the house he lives in, the rectory, is scheduled to be sold before he retires. Father Tim decides to buy the house himself. When he retires, Father Tim plans to rent the house out and move into his wife's small house next door. Father Tim also finds himself struggling with a full house, including his wife and son, after being a bachelor for more than five decades. It is difficult getting used to the noise, but Father Tim quickly discovers he loves the chaos.

## Cynthia Kavanagh

Cynthia Kavanagh is a fifty-something writer. Cynthia is well known for her books which feature her cat, Violet. Cynthia and Father Tim met in a previous novel in this series when Cynthia bought the small, yellow house next door to the rectory. Father Tim and Cynthia have now been married for almost two years. Cynthia is Father Tim's rock, the one person in town who looks out for Father Tim's health and sanity. Cynthia often schedules retreats for Father Tim, forcing him to take some time off and take care of himself. Cynthia also monitors her husband's nutrition with an eye to his sugar levels because of a recent diagnosis of diabetes.



## Dooley Barstowe

Dooley Barstowe is the son of Pauline Barstowe, an alcoholic who once resided in the poor area known only as the Creek. Dooley came to live with Father Tim several years prior to the beginning of this novel because his mother could no longer take care of him. Father Tim has taken his role as parent to Dooley very seriously and does all he can to care for the boy's mental and physical health. Dooley attends a private boarding school for his high school education and often spends time at Meadowgate because of his interest in veterinarian medicine. Dooley is a typical teenager, taking a summer job, hanging out with his friends, and enjoying a blooming interest in girls. Dooley spends a great deal of the summer with a girl named Jenny, but as the summer draws to an end, his interest turns to fellow Creek resident, Lace.

## Pauline Barstowe

Pauline Barstowe is an alcoholic who lived in Creek for a long time. In the last novel of the series, Pauline was burned by a male acquaintance. Pauline is now in recovery, trying to straighten her life out. As part of her sobriety, Pauline has been forced to come to terms with the fact that she has given away four of her five children. Father Tim has one of her children and in this novel helps reunite her with another of her children, five-year-old Jessie. Pauline manages to get a job at Hope House in this novel and Father Tim helps her find a place of her own where she can live with two of her children.

In this novel, Pauline Barstowe begins seeing Buck Leeper, a construction supervisor who has come to town to help renovate the attic of Lord's Chapel. Buck is an alcoholic who is still actively drinking. One night, Buck offers Pauline a drink and she becomes drunk. Pauline is ashamed of what she has done and decides to join AA despite her previous belief that she did not need to join a support group. Pauline also cuts Buck out of her life, trying to put distance between herself and temptation.

## Buck Leeper

Buck Leeper is a construction supervisor who has come to Mitford to watch over the renovation of the Lord's Chapel attic to make more space for Sunday school classes. Buck Leeper is a recurrent character, having been in a previous novel of the series when he came to help with construction at Hope House. Buck is an alcoholic. Father Tim attempted to help Buck previously and was successful enough to help Buck reach a point where he only drinks on the weekends. However, Buck refuses to acknowledge he has a problem until he loses Pauline Barlowe after encouraging her back into the bottle. Buck returns to Father Tim and asks for help, which Father Tim willingly offers.



## Winnie Ivy

Winnie Ivy is a local business owner in Mitford. Winnie is the owner and baker at Sweet Stuff Bakery. At the beginning of the novel, Winnie's brother, Joe, moves to Tennessee to be closer to another brother and sister. Winnie wants to go with Joe, but hesitates about selling her business. Winnie does put the shop up for sale, but questions her decision repeatedly. When Winnie gets an offer from a real estate outfit called H. Tide, Father Tim encourages her to put off a decision until she returns from a free cruise she has won. Winnie then gets an offer to continue working in the bakery, but to sell it to the same business. Winnie agrees and signs the contract. However, after she does, Father Tim learns that the business buying her bakery is owned by an unkind local woman. Father Tim helps Winnie get out of the contract.

Winnie goes on her cruise and meets a tall, dark haired man that she often dreamt about before the cruise. This man is a pastry chef and he comes back to Mitford with Winnie. Eventually the two become engaged. The man asks Father Tim for Winnie's hand in marriage and he is more than willing to give it, happy to see his friend so happy.

## Esther Cunningham

Esther Cunningham is the mayor of Mitford. Esther has been mayor for eight terms, sixteen years, and is running for a ninth term. Esther is not expecting competition, so she is surprised when Mack Stroupe runs for mayor. At first it seems like a joke, but soon Esther becomes concerned and begins planning a campaign to run against Mack. When the day of the election comes, Esther is told she has lost by one vote. A recount shows that the election ended in a tie. A flip of a coin makes Esther mayor.

## Esther Bolick

Esther Bolick is the chairman of the Bane and Blessings charity event. Esther finds this job very difficult, often calling Father Tim for support. Three days before the Bane and Blessing is to be held, Esther falls and breaks her wrist, her elbow, and her jaw. Esther's jaw is wired shut, causing difficulty to the food committee who needs her recipe for her famous orange marmalade cake. Esther never writes her recipes down, so when they finally get the recipe, copies are made and sent to anyone interested all over town. In the end, the Bane and Blessing raises more than twenty thousand dollars, making it the most successful event in years.

## Mack Stroupe

Mack Stroupe is a hot dog vendor who is running for mayor. When Mack begins running for mayor, he has a brand new truck and he is throwing money around all over town. Due to the fact that Mack is known to beat his wife and keep a girlfriend in another town, no one in Mitford is interested in voting for him. However, Mack pushes the idea that



change is good for Mitford and takes credit for several possible real estate development deals. Slowly people begin changing their opinions and supporting Mack. It looks like Mack will win the election, even though Father Tim has discovered that Mack is getting support from a rich neighbor. In the end, Mack and Esther tie, causing a coin toss to make Esther mayor again.

## **Edith Mallory**

Edith Mallory is a rich neighbor of Mitford who owns several businesses on Main Street. Edith Mallory is not a kind woman, and has clashed with Father Tim in a previous novel. Edith wants to control Mitford, in part to get back at Father Tim for turning down her romantic overtures. Edith Mallory gives Mack Stroupe the money he needs to run his campaign in order to promote her own companies and their desire to bring commerce to Mitford. Edith is out maneuvered every time by Father Tim without either of them realizing what the other is doing.





## Objects/Places

### Lace's Hat

Lace has an old, ugly hat that she wears because it reminds her of where she came from. Dooley hides the hat from Lace, causing a fight. However, this episode encourages Lace to move beyond her past.

### Orange Marmalade Cake

Esther Bolick bakes an orange marmalade cake that everyone in Mitford loves. When Esther is injured and has her jaw wired shut, the women helping organize the Bane and Blessing hound her, attempting to find a way to get the recipe from her.

### Bane and Blessing

The Bane and Blessing is a large fundraiser organized by Lord's Chapel to raise money for various charities.

### H. Tide

H. Tide is the name of a reality company based in Florida that has shown interest in buying the rectory and Sweet Stuff Bakery. Father Tim later comes to realize that H. Tide is owned by Edith Mallory, an unkind woman who likes to wield the power of wealth over people.

### Miami Development

Miami Development is the name of a real estate development company that wants to buy Fernbank and turn it into a spa. Father Tim is against this sale because he does not feel the deceased owner would be happy with it and because the company is offering a hundred thousand dollars less than it is worth.

### Meadowgate

Meadowgate is the name of the farm where Hal Owen has a thriving veterinarian practice. It is to Meadowgate that Father Tim takes his dog, Barnabas, when he is hit by a car.



## **Fernbank**

Fernbank is the name of the family home that once belonged to Father Tim's good friend Miss Sadie Baxter.

## **Hope House**

Hope House is a home for elderly people. Hope House was built with the generous donations of Miss Sadie, a friend of Father Tim's.

## **Little Yellow House**

Cynthia owns the small, yellow house next door to the rectory. It is in this house that Father Tim and Cynthia hope to retire in eighteen months.

## **Rectory**

The rectory is an old, two story house owned by the Episcopal diocese and has provided housing for the rector of Lord's Chapel for many years. The church has decided to sell the house when Father Tim retires, but they receive an offer they cannot pass up nearly a year before his retirement date. To keep from being kicked out of his home, Father Tim decides to buy the rectory.

## **Lord's Chapel**

Lord's Chapel is the name of the church where Father Tim preaches.

## **Sweet Stuff Bakery**

Sweet Stuff Bakery is owned by Winnie Ivy and is situated in downtown Mitford. Winnie considers selling the bakery and moving to Tennessee with her brother, Joe, but finally decides against it.

## **Mitford, North Carolina**

Mitford is a small village in North Carolina where everyone knows everyone else.



# Themes

## Religion

This novel is about an Episcopal priest, therefore it is implied that it will contain a great deal of religious overtone. This includes the fact that Father Tim's dog is trained to obey when he hears Scripture being recited, the fact that Father Tim often prays with his wife in order to help them make every day decisions, and the fact that Father Tim turns to a higher power when he gains knowledge he knows can hurt people and he does not know what to do with it. However, the religion in this novel goes much further than just a characterization of one person who populates its pages.

Father Tim does not push religion on people the way some Christians do. Father Tim prays with his congregants, but he does not force his opinions on those who do not attend his church. Instead, Father Tim is a friend who is always content, always there with a good word. Father Tim only wants to help those he cares about. Religion is Father Tim's calling, but he understands that not everyone wants this kind of organized belief in their lives. Therefore, Father Tim spreads the word of the gospel by being a kind person and a good friend, rather than by preaching.

Religion finds its way into the lives of the people around Father Tim not because of his preaching, but because of his kindness. Religion is an organized thing, but it is also a state of mind. There are characters in the novel who are not religious, yet they are good friends with Father Tim and they often learn Scripture simply by listening to Father Tim's advice and by following his example in the community. For these reasons, religion is a theme of the novel.

## Alcoholism

There are a group of people in this novel who have been rescued by Father Tim from a place called the Creek, a community of poor and homeless people who often turn to drugs and alcohol to deal with every day struggle. Pauline Barstowe is one of these people. Pauline is a heavy drinker who, one by one, gave away her five children in order to get that next drink. Pauline resisted the efforts of those around her to save her from the bottle until one night a man lit her on fire. Pauline lost an ear and has scars on her face and arm. However, this event has helped Pauline see what a disaster alcohol has done to her life and helped her resist the next drink.

Buck Leeper is also an alcoholic. Buck's father once poured bourbon down his throat until he was sick. From that time on, Buck's father encouraged him to drink until Buck could drink him under the table. After his father's death, Buck swore he would never touch another drink, but every day stress leads him back to the bottle again and again. On his last job in Mitford, Buck had a kind of psychotic break while drinking and was saved by Father Tim. This time around, Father Tim wants to help Buck kick the bottle all



together, but Buck feels there is nothing out there for him to fight for. Then Buck meets Pauline. Buck adores Pauline and her children and finds himself spending a lot of time with them. However, one night Buck has a drink and talks Pauline into drinking with him.

In order to save herself, Pauline cuts Buck out of her life. Buck becomes depressed and decides to leave town when his job is concluded. However, Buck cannot go. Buck returns to Father Tim and asks for help. Father Tim prays with Buck and teaches him how to welcome God into his life in order to help him overcome his addiction. Buck accepts this and finds his way back to Pauline.

## Family

Father Tim had been single for sixty years before he married Cynthia. Once Father Tim came home to an empty house and took care of himself. Now Father Tim comes home to utter chaos. The housekeeper brings her infant twin girls to work every day, the dog and the cat are constantly fighting, Dooley is in and out of the house with one friend or another, and Harley, a man rescued from the Creek, is downstairs fighting with Lace over the history she wants him to learn. Father Tim cannot find a quiet room in the house to save his life. Father Tim has filled his home with his semi-adopted son, his wife, his animals, and his friends. To Father Tim, this chaos is music to his ears.

Pauline Barlowe has been an alcoholic most of her adult life and has become sober, only to realize that she has given away most of her children. Father Tim is helping her find those children, but it is a slow and painful process. It is difficult for Pauline to live with what she has done, but it is her family who is helping her remain sober. At the same time, Winnie Ivy is thinking of moving to Tennessee to be closer to her brothers and sister. Winnie wants to be with the people who love her most. Esther Bilock is struggling to plan the Bane and Blessings event, turning to anyone in town willing to lend a hand. Esther Cunningham is running for mayor for the ninth time.

Family is more than the people one is related to by blood. Family consists of the people who care about you and who are willing to go out on a limb for you. Father Tim has found family in his wife, his son, and his friends. Pauline finds family in Father Tim and her own children. Winnie eventually finds it in the town where she lives, as does Esther Bilock and Esther Cunningham. This novel is about the family that a small town can become, making family a main theme of the novel.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view is third person. The main character is Father Tim, therefore most of the novel is seen through his eyes. However, the author also moves into the minds of other townspeople from time to time, allowing the reader to see how the townspeople feel about Father Tim and the things that are happening in the town around them. The point of view has some elements of the omniscient point of view, but it is limited in that the point of view tends to have some distance from the characters, allowing them to keep some things private until the author is ready to reveal these things to the reader. For example, Father Tim decides to buy the rectory toward the end of the novel, but the reader does not learn that this is his intention until after the purchase has been made.

The point of view of this novel has some distance from the characters that allows them to keep secrets, but it is still a point of view that allows some intimacy with the character's thoughts and feelings, allowing the reader to care enough about the events of the novel and their affect on the characters to continue reading through to the end. The point of view works well in this novel because it is laid back, like life in a small town tends to be, and because it reveals enough about the characters to make the plot interesting.

## Setting

The novel is set in the fictional town of Mitford, North Carolina. Mitford is a very small town where everyone knows everyone else. There are no Walmarts or department stores in Mitford, only small, mom and pop type stores. Life in Mitford is quiet, the type of life that people in large cities can only imagine. Father Tim is a parental figure in this small town, advising people in everything from their relationship to God to whether or not they should sell their businesses and move to Tennessee. Mitford is like a town from the forties that has hidden from progression.

The setting of this novel is one of the most important elements of the plot because the plot is based on the relationships this small town has inspired between its townspeople. If not for the small size of this town, there more than likely would not be the relationship Father Tim has with the townspeople, including those who do not attend his church. Also, if not for this small town, there would be no concern about big business coming to Mitford and bringing with it the modernization the town has so far been spared, which is a large portion of what the plot of the novel is about. Therefore, the setting of this novel not only works with the plot, but is an essential element of the plot.



## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in the simple language of small town America. The novel contains no slang, no foreign phrases, or other language that would make the novel difficult or impossible for its readers to comprehend. The language does contain, however, the simple vernacular of the poor people who populate the area known as the Creek. This language dominates the dialogue spoken by these Creek characters and makes some of the dialogue difficult to understand. However, this vernacular is important in characterizing these less fortunate characters and therefore is worth the reader's time to understand.

The language of this novel is simple and it characterizes the simple lives of the people who populate Mitford, the novel's fictional town. The language is not difficult to understand, except for the vernacular of the Creek people, but it is not so simple that it undermines the intelligence of the reader. The novel is written in a language that is laid back, relaxed, and filled with religious overtones, leaving the reader feeling as though they are actually eavesdropping on conversations among people in a real small town somewhere in the south. The language represents the characters of the novel well, adding to the authenticity of their fictional backgrounds, therefore it works well within the plot.

## Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-one chapters. Each chapter is given a name that represents something or someone that is important to the plot that takes place within the chapter. Within each chapter, the author has provided many breaks that alert the reader to changing scenes or a change of narration. The novel is written mainly from the point of view of Father Tim, therefore a great deal of the exposition in this novel consists of Father Tim's thoughts and emotions and how they see the actions of the plot.

There are many plot lines in this novel. This novel follows the everyday life of Father Tim, therefore much of the plot has to do with his everyday actions. One plot follows Father Tim's ongoing attempts to reunite the Barlowe family following Pauline Barlowe's actions during her battle with alcoholism in which she gave away most of her five children. Another plot follows the mayoral campaign and Mack Stroupe's attempt to oust long time mayor, Esther Cunningham. There are also many subplots that follow Father Tim's many other interests, including the sale of both the rectory and Fernbank. Most of the plots come to a satisfactory ending at the conclusion of the novel, but others are left unresolved, suggesting they will be dealt with in a subsequent novel in this series.



## Quotes

"The indoor plants were among the first to venture outside and breathe the fresh, cold air of Mitford's early spring." Chap. 1, A Tea and a Half, p. 1

"'He who is not impatient is not in love,' said an old Italian proverb." Chap. 2, Step by Step, p. 29

"Step by step. That was the answer." Chap. 2, Step by Step, p. 34

"He shuddered at the memory of Pauline Barlowe, who, burned horribly by a man known as LM, had not only endured the agony of skin grafting and the loss of an ear, but had to live with the bitter truth that she'd given away four of her five children." Chap. 3, Eden, p. 41

"Clearly, the much-discussed and controversial affliction from which St. Paul had prayed thrice to be delivered had been diabetes." Chap. 3, Eden, p. 65

"Her old life was written on her face, as all our lives are written, but something shone through that and transformed it." Chap. 5, Out to Canaan, p. 75

"Suddenly he didn't feel a hundred years old in the shade, he was feeling more like—why not say it?—seventeen." Chap. 7, Housewarming, p. 114

"He had stopped to pass the time of day with the llamas, who looked at him peaceably through veils of sweeping lashes." Chap. 8, Political Barbecue, p. 134

"It was enough. He wanted nothing more." Chap. 9, Life in the Fast Lane, p. 158

"He also liked the game because it reminded him of his boyhood, which was as vivid in his recall as if he had lived it last week." Chap. 14, Play Ball, p. 238

"So what if he shouldn't have a napoleon? Hadn't he waited more than a decade to eat a measly cheeseburger the other day?" Chap. 16, Bookends, p. 260

"He sat clutching the pint of cream in a bag, feeling they'd gone forth and captured some valuable trophy or prize, as they rode slowly between the ranks of angels on high and turned onto their trackless street." Chap. 21, Lion and Lamb, p. 342



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Father Tim? In what church does he practice? Why is he married? Are all priest allowed to marry? How long has Father Tim been married? Is this his first marriage? How old is Father Tim? How does this impact his marriage? How does this impact the way he looks at the world, at his congregation? How do the townspeople feel about Father Tim? How does he feel about them?

Who is Pauline Barlowe? Why are three of her children missing at the beginning of the novel? Why does her son, Dooley, live with Father Tim? How did Pauline get burned? What disease is Pauline battling? How does Pauline meet Buck Leeper? How does Buck affect Pauline's attempts to clean up her life? How does Buck's actions affect his relationship with Pauline? With Father Tim? With his own struggle? Will Buck change for Pauline?

Who is Harley? How does Harley come to live with Father Tim? Who is Lace? What relationship does Harley have with Lace? How is Lace instrumental in bringing Harley to Father Tim? Who finds the apartment in the basement of the rectory? Who talks Father Tim into allowing Harley to live in this apartment?

Who is Dooley? Why does he live with Father Tim and Cynthia? Where does Dooley go to school? Where does he spend his summer? Where does he work? How does Dooley feel about Lace at the beginning of the novel? Why does Dooley steal Lace's hat? How does Dooley's feelings change through the course of the novel? How does the reader become aware of this change in feelings on Dooley's part? Where might this change take Dooley and Lace?

Who is Mack Stroupe? What office is he running for? Why do most of the townspeople find this unexpected? How does Mack Stroupe begin his campaign? Where did he get the money? Why does Father Tim become suspicious of Mack Stroupe's spending sprees? Who does Father Tim believe is behind Mack Stroupe's campaign? What does Father Tim choose to do about what he knows? Why?

What is Fernbank? Why does Father Tim have an interest in who buys Fernbank? Why does Father Tim not feel right about selling Fernbank to Miami Development? Who is Miami Development? What do they plan to do with Fernbank? Who eventually buys Fernbank? What are they going to do with it?

Who is Winnie Ivy? What business does she own? What does she confess to Father Tim that she has always dreamed of having in her business? How does Father Tim help Winnie get a free cruise? How does Father Tim help Winnie make a decision about selling her business? What does Father Tim learn that keeps Winnie from selling the business? Was this a good choice? Is Winnie happy with her decision?