

Saving CeeCee Honeycutt Study Guide

Saving CeeCee Honeycutt by Beth Hoffman

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Plot Summary

Saving CeeCee Honeycutt by Beth Hoffman is a story about a young girl named Cecelia who begins her life in Willoughby, Ohio with her mother Camille and her father Carl. Cecelia's father is a travelling salesman who spends most of his time on the road, and as such, Cecelia is raised mostly by her mother. Unfortunately, her mother develops signs of psychosis when Cecelia is just seven years old, and Cecelia's life is a challenge from then forward.

Cecelia first notices something wrong with her mother when she comes down in the morning and nothing is ready for her to go to school. Instead, her mother sits despondent and barely responsive. When she does communicate, she tells Cecelia that one day she'll take her back to Georgia where people still know how to live, and know what etiquette and propriety are - something sadly lacking in the north, she insists. Camille gets worse, and Cecelia never knows what she might come home to. One day, walking home from school, a group of boys tease her about the fruitcake in her front yard. Cecelia is horrified when she discovers her mother in the front yard, her dark hair bleached white and dressed in an old yellow prom dress complete with sash and tiara. She is soliciting votes for the great state of Georgia, she tells everyone who passes, blowing kisses to them all.

Cecelia begins to spend more time in the library, hiding from the issues at home. On the rare occasions that her father is home, they argue non-stop and his time at home becomes more and more infrequent. When a woman begins calling their house for him and won't leave her name, Cecelia knows he is cheating on her mother. The next time he comes home, she begs him to put her mother in a home, but he insists the cost is prohibitive and since she isn't hitting Cecelia, Cecelia should just try to keep her inside. A part of Cecelia begins to hate her father that day.

Cecelia's only respite occurs on Sundays when she spends them with their elderly neighbor, Mrs. Gertrude Odell. Mrs. Odell provides the only normalcy Cecelia's life knows and Cecelia relies on her more than once when her mother is psychotic. One day, her mother invites Cecelia to join her on a shopping excursion for a new dress, telling her that they can enter a mother/daughter competition. In that moment, Cecelia wishes her dead, or at the very least, wishes she'd just keep walking and not come back. Cecelia gets her wish, when her mother steps in front of an ice cream truck and is hit and killed.

Carl is at a loss as to how to proceed when Cecelia's great aunt Tallulah Caldwell arrives. She makes it clear that Cecelia needs a stable home, and suggests that she take her back to Georgia with her. The next morning, Carl goes to the hardware store just before Tallulah arrives. She introduces herself, and helps Cecelia load her two boxes of possessions. Her father leaves only a note wishing her well as a goodbye after assuring her that one day she'll thank him for this.



Though the transition is difficult, and Cecelia struggles with her mother's death, life for Cecelia improves exponentially. She is surprised over the course of the summer with Tallulah to learn that both her mother and her father were right. Her mother had always insisted that in Georgia, people knew how to treat each other and how to live. Cecelia discovers this is true. Her father told her that one day she'd thank him for sending her there, and this also turns out to be true.

By the time the summer is over, Cecelia is enrolled in Rosewood School for Girls; has a new friend named Dixie Lee to go to school with; she loves her Aunt Tootie and Oletta who runs the household; and has made numerous friends including their neighbor Thelma Rae Goodpepper. The crowning touch occurs when circumstances conspire to have Mrs. Odell living with her in Aunt Tallulah's house as well.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Cecelia Honeycutt lives with her mother and father in Willoughby, Ohio. Cecelia is only about seven when her mother's mental illness reveals itself for the first time and she gets up to find her mother sitting, staring out the window. There is no breakfast ready, and no school dress ironed and waiting. She tells Cecelia that when she is better, she'll take them both to Georgia where people really know how to live. She remains depressed for the rest of the winter and just as Cecelia begins to wonder if she will ever smile again, spring comes and with it a change in her mother's mood. She is bright and happy; cuts flowers and spreads them around the house; paints her nails, and dances Cecelia around the living room. She takes Cecelia to town for new clothes, and purchases so many shoes that even the salesman comments. When the parcels are loaded, Camille takes Cecelia out for burgers. When Cecelia's father returns from a three week business trip to discover the abundance of Camille's recent shopping trip, he cuts up her credit card.

From then on, Cecelia is never sure what waits for her when she comes home. Once, when Cecelia is just nine, a group of boys run by and yell that there is a fruitcake in her front yard. Cecelia is so embarrassed that she runs to the library and hides in a bathroom stall until maintenance makes her leave. Camille begins shopping at Goodwill, bringing home old and worn prom dresses. At home she tries them on, seeing the beauty queen she used to be in her reflection, and promising Cecelia she'll keep them all for her. Cecelia's embarrassment prevents her from making friends. The only thing she looks forward to are Sundays.

Cecelia spends Sunday mornings with their elderly neighbor, Gertrude Odell and has been doing so for as long as she can remember. A widower, Mrs. Odell enjoys the company, and Cecelia loves the normalcy. Cecelia does odd jobs for Mrs. Odell like weeding her garden or helping her with things that are heavy while Mrs. Odell makes Cecelia's lunch for school each day, and spends Sundays with her. Cecelia and Mrs. Odell listen to sermons on the radio. Cecelia hears about the festival held on Saturday morning and disguising herself, she attends. From there, she goes into the church and quietly watches several women praying with beads, wearing lace fabric on their heads. She wonders if the beads have special power.

Later, she hears her mother and father arguing, and watches as he drives away. She takes a strand of her mother's pearls and, pinning an old doily to her head, she lights a candle and talks to God. She begs Him to save her mother. She continues daily for more than two months before deciding that she's prayed enough for a lifetime. Books quickly fill the void and Cecelia rises to the top of her class. She spends every afternoon in the library, pretending she doesn't need anyone. At twelve she comes home to find a saucepan on the stove, burning. Upstairs her mother is wailing, looking at a photograph of herself as the 1951 Vidalia Onion Queen. She tells Cecelia she doesn't belong in this



life she's been stuck in. Frightened Cecelia runs a bath and then reads to her mother until she calms down. Then she helps her into bed and goes down to clean up the mess. When she's done, she goes to Mrs. Odell's and tells her an abridged version of what happened. After she checks that Camille is sleeping, Mrs. Odell takes her back to her house for dinner.

One day a strange woman calls for her father, and won't leave her name. Soon after, he gets home and Cecelia confronts him about her mother. They argue, Cecelia insisting she should be in a hospital. Her father figures that as long as she doesn't hit Cecelia, everything is fine and all she has to do is keep her in the house. Cecelia argues, threatening to talk to someone at school or the police if necessary. When he gets angry, she asks him who the woman was that called and asks if she is why he is never at home. Even angrier, he wonders aloud why he ever comes home and leaves again. Later she finds her mother on the back porch watching a bird in the tree. A red winged black bird lifts off and they watch him until he is gone. Her mother comments that she wishes she were that bird and could fly back to reclaim her life in Georgia. Cecelia takes her hand and leads her inside, suggesting she rest a bit before dinner.

Analysis

Mental illness is the opening theme in this story as Cecelia recalls events as early as when she was seven years old in which her mother exhibited behavior that was both frightening and distressing. Cecelia and her mother live alone more often than not, while her father works on the road as a salesman. He manages to avoid most of the issues his wife is having, leaving Cecelia to deal with them on her own – issues a seven year old should never face and that would be disturbing to an adult, let alone a child. Cecelia is never sure what she'll come home to. Some days, her mother seems unable to summon the enthusiasm to breathe while other days Cecelia comes home to find her mother locked in the past. On one occasion Cecelia comes home from school to find her mother has bleached her hair white, and is dressed in her old yellow prom dress, wearing a rhinestone tiara. She calls out to those who pass, soliciting votes to become the next representative for Georgia. As a result, Cecelia grows up before her time.

Camille believes she was conned out of the life she was supposed to have. She clings to the memories of winning a beauty pageant as a young woman in Georgia, trying desperately to hold onto the youth that has already passed her by. She clings to the trappings of a debutant, buying prom dresses at Goodwill and trying to recapture days gone by. Wearing them, she looks at her reflection, but sees only the younger and beautiful version of herself, reality eluding her. Cecelia recognizes her need to believe she is still beautiful, and tells her so to calm her down when Camille's behavior becomes more erratic than usual. Camille looks at her daughter and realizes how alike they are telling her that one day all of her prom dresses will be handed down to her, and inwardly, Cecelia is appalled.

Relationships, and the challenges and rewards they present are also a prominent theme in this first segment. Camille and Carl play out the last years of their marriage, avoiding



all issues of importance, and each other. Carl spends most of his time on the road, and uses any excuse to return to it. He avoids the woman Camille has become, unable to love someone who cannot love herself and who has come to hate him. Love and hate are close enough in strength emotionally that this couple exchanges one for the other. Camille blames Carl for filling her head full of unrealized dreams and unrecognized potential. She tells Cecelia that marrying her father was a big mistake saying he is cold and boring like all Northerners. She adds that if an older man ever sweeps her off her feet, she should run – fast, resentful of the age difference between them which is a considerable twenty-four years. She complains that he is a Yankee liar who makes promises he doesn't keep. She thought she'd grow up as the belle of the ball, dancing with the upper class and dining in the finest establishments. She thought life would be an adventure, and instead, she is miserable. Carl refuses to deal with the issues his wife is having, and simply replaces her on the road, finding another woman who enjoys his company and is less demanding than Camille. At the same time, Cecelia is given an example of what a normal life would be like when she goes next door each Sunday to share the morning with Mrs. Odell. These mornings begin with breakfast together, listening to hymns on the radio. Mrs. Odell loves Cecelia's company, making her feel welcome and loved, making her lunch each morning, just to help out, and takes the place even briefly of the mother that Cecelia didn't have at home. She inspired and complimented Cecelia, making her laugh and smile, even if just for a short time. These brief visits were what Cecelia lived for.

Desperation is a theme for Cecelia as she tries desperately to find a way to help her mother. She tries everything from praying every day for more than two months to begging her father to take her mother to a hospital. She even threatens to tell the nurse at school or the police, but her father insists they won't do anything. Cecelia needs someone else to be the adult for a while, and needs her mother to get help so that she can go back to being a normal child again; perhaps make a friend or two. The fact that she begs and threatens her father in an effort to be the catalyst for change foreshadows changes for Cecelia. The louder she calls for help and the more she draws attention to her circumstances, the more likely she is to find someone who will try to help her and her mother, and regardless of who they try to help, Cecelia's life will change dramatically.

Isolation is more the reality of Cecelia's life as she is isolated from children her age because of her mother's outrageous behavior. Everyone knew her mother wasn't right, and children her age avoided her as though what her mother had was catching.

Discussion Question 1

What two different lifestyles is Cecelia intimately acquainted with? What are some of the main differences between the two?



Discussion Question 2

What is the highlight of Cecelia's week, and why is that the case?

Discussion Question 3

How does Camille see her marriage to Carl and how does she view her life in general, based on the first segment of this story?

Vocabulary

proprietary, etiquette, exclusively, compliments, evaporate, sanitarium, suspicion, epaulets



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

In the beginning of June 1967, the police came to the house to tell Carl that Camille had been struck and killed by an Ice Cream Truck called the Happy Cow. The next few days are a blur for Cecelia. Other than Cecelia and her father, the funeral was attended by Mrs. Odell and the woman who ran Goodwill, Dottie McGee. Most of it is still blank for Cecelia, although she remembers wondering if her prayers to God had caused this course of action. As they walk to the car afterwards, a red winged blackbird flies low over the cemetery and chirps as he disappears. Cecelia remembers how her mother had wanted to be a black bird so that she could fly back to Georgia. She asks Mrs. Odell what direction it flew in, and when she learns it was south, she can't help but smile.

At home, her father tries to talk to her, but she walks away from him and goes up to her room. She prays to God, telling him she's sorry and hopes it isn't her fault but hoping her mother will be better with him. Then she falls asleep on her bed, waking in the early afternoon to the sound of the most beautiful car she'd ever seen in pulling into the driveway. She overhears Tallulah talking to her father about her mother, and looks up psychosis, unnerved by the genetic connection she sees. After Tallulah leaves, Carl tries to talk to Cecelia about their family history, and mentions that her great Aunt Tallulah has offered to take her home with her permanently. Cecelia balks, wanting to stay with Mrs. Odell instead, but her father reminds her that her age would make that impractical. Cecelia can hardly breathe as Cecelia realizes how much her mother's death will change things in her life.

Later, her father brings Cecelia a suitcase and tells her she can only take some of her books and Cecelia argues that they'd helped her get a straight A report card. Carl is stunned when he sees it, and is almost more surprised when she reveals she's read them all. He tells her she should be proud of how smart she is, and tells her she can take one box of books. He doesn't hold it against her when she tells him she hates him.

Cecelia realizes as she is packing that no matter where she is going, it would likely be an improvement. The rest of the afternoon, Cecelia spent sorting through her books and finally decided on her favorites; Gulliver's Travels, The Chronicles of Narnia; and her Nancy Drew series. Later, when her father steps out for a few minutes, Cecelia goes into her mother's room. She hangs up her mother's dresses, and then takes her mother's scrapbook and puts it in her suitcase. She can almost hear her mother telling her that one day all of those dresses would be hers, and she can't help but say no out loud.

Mrs. Odell is sitting on the porch when Cecelia comes out and the thought of never seeing her again inspires panic. She runs over to her and they stand together, hugging each other for a long time before they finally sit down together. Cecelia asks her if she



can live with her, and Mrs. Odell assures her she wishes she could, but that Cecelia's Life Book wasn't written that way. She explains that they are both about to embark on an adventure. She assures Cecelia that when a chapter in her book is done, her spirit will know it even if she's fearful. They tell each other how much they mean to each other and Mrs. Odell shares her plans to escape the cold winters to go and live with her cousin Adele in Florida. She assures her that Florida and Georgia aren't that far apart and she is sure they'll see each other again.

Cecelia thinks about her first memory of Mrs. Odell – her fourth birthday. The incident replays itself in her mind as they sit there. Mrs. Odell asks Cecelia to write to her, promising to write back and Cecelia is heartbroken. The next morning, Cecelia wakes knowing it is her last morning in this house. Her father is asleep on the couch, wearing yesterday's clothes with an empty whiskey bottle on the floor beside him. Feeling nothing but contempt, Cecelia goes out to the back yard, and commits the scene to memory. She turns to go inside and something shifts in her perception, and all at once Cecelia understands what Mrs. Odell had told her, and that a chapter in her Life Book had come to a close.

Analysis

Death and loss are the themes that open this segment as Cecelia and her father learn that Camille is dead – hit by the Happy Cow Ice Cream truck. It is ironic that a 'Happy Cow' truck would hit a woman who suffered such mental swings that she could sometimes be found dressed as though she were going to a prom or soliciting votes to represent Georgia. Cecelia suffers shock and after throwing up, she remembers little about the day of her mother's death.

The family theme - or lack of family in this case - continues to be in the forefront as Cecelia loses her only real familial link when her mother dies. Since her father is gone most of the time, her relationship with him has been less than ideal, and when she begins to receive telephone calls from women who won't identify themselves or leave a message for him, she loses any small measure of respect she might have once had for him realizing that he is seeing other women while he is away from them. When she learns that her mother is dead, she is given no measure of comfort or concern by her father who instead buries himself in a bottle and drinks himself to sleep. Cecelia is left to cope with her mother's death alone, knowing that in many ways her father is responsible for it because he was unwilling to even try to get help for his wife even when she begged him to. The only real family that Cecelia now has is Mrs. Odell and circumstances will soon move them away from each other.

The family theme continues when Tallulah arrives and Cecelia overhears some of her conversation with her father downstairs. She tells Carl that she knew something was wrong years ago when Camille stopped communicating with her and no longer cashed the birthday cheques she sent for Cecelia. She can't understand why Carl never called her to ask for help, but Carl insists there was nothing she could have done. Cecelia learns from listening that Tallulah believed Camille suffered from psychosis and that



there is a genetic connection to her condition – a familial connection Cecelia could do without. The knowledge that she has extended family is a surprise to Cecelia who can't understand why she'd never been told about them before.

Camille's death and Carl's inability to be a father to Cecelia foreshadow great changes in Cecelia's immediate future. After death, change is inevitable and Cecelia learns this when she realizes that she will be leaving the only home she knows to live with family she can't remember ever meeting. Her fear of change is addressed by Mrs. Odell who describes it as another chapter in her Life Book. She takes the time to explain that when a chapter in life is ending, her spirit will recognize the fact and be ready to move on even if she isn't. Her father insists that one day she would thank him for sending her to live in Georgia with her great aunt, but his desertion of her just makes her resent him even further.

Guilt is also a theme as Cecelia can't help but wonder if her prayers to God were responsible for her mother's death. She wonders if God had looked in on her mother and decided that the best thing for everyone would be if she were in His care instead of theirs, misinterpreting her prayers that he help them both.

Freedom is also a theme as Cecelia leaves the cemetery and sees a blackbird flying low over the area before disappearing over the tops of the trees. Camille had once told Cecelia that if she could, she would transform herself into a blackbird and fly back to Georgia. Seeing the blackbird at the cemetery and knowing that it flew south when it left makes Cecelia wonder if her mother had finally found the freedom she so desperately wanted.

The idea of death is a theme that Cecelia ponders after the funeral, wondering if there was a special place in heaven for the mentally ill, and if those who were ill became well once they died. She prays again to God, expressing her sorrow over her mother's death and her hopes that her prayers were not the catalyst that caused her death. She asks God to help her mother find her way to him and that she find a place with Him where beauty pageants did not exist.

Moving is difficult for anyone, but when Carl tells Cecelia that she must leave most of her books behind, she balks. She shows him her report card, and he is stunned when he realizes that she is a straight A student. She tells him that her books were responsible for her grades, and Carl realizes for the first time that she's read every book she owns. He reveals just how little he knows his daughter when he tells her he will give away whatever is left behind, but he does relent a little bit and allows Cecelia to take a full box of books of her choice.

The continuity of family and life are touched on as Cecelia goes through her mother's room and takes with her the only thing her mother valued – her scrapbook, filled with the memories and remnants of her history. She takes the time to hang up her mother's dresses, smoothing them out in recognition of her mother's love for them and lining them up in the closet by color. Standing back, she whispers her goodbye, hearing her mother's voice in her mind telling her that one day all of those 'lovely' dresses would be



hers. The comment is so real to her that she can't help but answer, insisting she won't ever wear them.

In this segment, Mrs. Odell compares the changes over time to a book of life that each of us has, telling Cecelia that their chapter was coming to a close but that another chapter would soon begin for them both. By comparing their lives to a book of chapters – each representing a change and an opportunity to learn and grow, she eases Cecelia's mind and helps ease the sorrow of the compound losses she is suffering.

Memories of Cecelia's surround events that include Mrs. Odell and reveal her to be more attentive to Cecelia's needs and celebrate the markers in her life more than her own parents were able to. This explains the reason that Cecelia is hit harder by the loss of Mrs. Odell than she is by effectively losing both of her parents. Though Cecelia reveals some attachment to her own bedroom, the things that she wants to remember and most will miss are all associated with the loving memories she has of Mrs. Odell.

Discussion Question 1

How does Carl respond when he learns of Camille's death, and how might he have made things easier for Cecelia?

Discussion Question 2

What is the single biggest lesson that Cecelia learns at this stage in her life and how does Mrs. Odell ease Cecelia's mind?

Discussion Question 3

What does Cecelia learn when she listens to the conversation between her father and Tallulah, and what disturbs her most when she researches this new information?

Vocabulary

proclamation, humiliated, disoriented, gossamer, protruding, dilapidated



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

Just after her father leaves for the hardware store, Cecelia watches as her great aunt pulls into the driveway and can barely bring herself to answer the door. Tallulah Caldwell introduces herself and tells Cecelia to call her Aunt Tootie. When her Aunt Tootie tells her that she'd sure love to have her, Cecelia bursts into tears and Aunt Tootie warps her in her arms, holding her until she cries herself out.

Aunt Tootie asks if Cecelia has everything she wants, incredulous that her life amounted to a box of clothes and a box of books, and while Cecelia is tempted to ask about taking more books, she says yes. They load up and asked if she is ready to go, Cecelia asks about her father. Aunt Tootie is sympathetic when she gives her the two line note from her father, and tells her that he'd thought it would be easier this way. Stunned, Cecelia reads the note; 19 words that spelled the death of her father to her from that day forward. Cecelia has one more chance to tell Mrs. Odell that she loves her, and to hear her say everything will be okay one more time. Aunt Tootie promises her to take good care of Cecelia using her given name Gertrude and surprising Cecelia who hadn't realized that Aunt Tootie had stopped and seen her earlier that morning because of how close they were.

Aunt Tootie and Cecelia get into the car and the journey to Savannah begins. They are on the road until five o'clock the following day, getting to know each other better. Aunt Tootie chatters away as she introduces Cecelia to her new home and Cecelia is overwhelmed by the size and grandeur of it all. Aunt Tootie tells her about Oletta, describing her as family, and Cecelia is given her choice of four bedrooms to claim as her own, but when Cecelia is shown the screened in sleeping porch on the top floor, she asks for permission to claim it. Aunt Tootie barely hesitates before agreeing for the warmer months at least.

Cecelia wakes to children's laughter passing and sits up, the reality of leaving Mrs. Odell making her ache. Oletta introduces herself by insisting she get out of bed, giving her five minutes to present herself downstairs. Oletta tells her that Aunt Tootie won't be back till after lunch and chastises Cecelia for coming to the table without shoes on. Oletta serves her a bowl of raspberries, and a bowl of brown sugar to compliment the cinnamon role she puts on a plate in front of her. Then she pulls the lid off the bowl on the table revealing oatmeal, and leaves the room. Cecelia is transported to another oatmeal episode when her mother had proudly served a lumpy bowl of oatmeal with broken candy canes and garnished with three old green olives and a sprinkle of paprika. In that moment Cecelia knows she doesn't belong and sobbing, wonders how much a bus home would cost.

Oletta comes in and before Cecelia knows it, her mouth develops a mind of its own and she finds herself telling Oletta everything. She talks about her mother's psychosis; her



father's desertion; her lonely existence and the loss of her only friend, Mrs. Odell. Embarrassed, she finally manages to stop, apologizing for her outburst. Oletta calmly suggests she eat, and dishes out a bowl of heaven that Cecelia consumes without hesitation before Oletta asks her what her name was. Cecelia introduces herself, her appetite wide awake now, adding nervously that she's the daughter of the 1951 Vidalia Onion Queen. Oletta can only agree that Cecelia's life has been some kind of crazy.

Oletta asks how old she is, and comments on how small she is for the age of twelve and calling Cecelia to her, she pulls her into her lap to 'give her a little sugar'. Oletta pats her back and apologizes for the abrupt wakeup, blaming aching joints on her demeanor, but promising that Cecelia had come to the right place to heal and she would. When Oletta leans back the chair snaps pitching them both to the floor and knocking Oletta unconscious for a moment. She comes to a minute later and when Cecelia offers to call an ambulance, Oletta tells her the chair needs a coroner instead and bursts into laughter that Cecelia cannot help but join, feeling like she had a girlfriend at last.

Analysis

Carl Honeycutt continues to reveal his lack of character when he leaves Cecelia in the morning before her great-aunt comes to pick her up, leaving a two line note in his stead. His heartless and insensitive behavior allows Cecelia to bury him before leaving along with her mother.

Change is the theme most prevalent throughout this segment as Cecelia travels to Savannah and is introduced to her new home. The house itself began with a foyer lit by an alabaster chandelier and with walls of peach and carved moldings. All around Cecelia are rich carpets, stuffed upholstery, vases of flowers and furniture of elegance and class. Cecelia is overwhelmed long before she sees bedrooms and is told to select one. The changes continue with the introduction of Oletta and the first bit of hope that Cecelia has known since meeting Mrs. Odell.

Aunt Tootie endears herself to Cecelia when she agrees to let her use the sleeping porch as her bedroom during the summer months, allowing Cecelia a space that she would feel comfortable in and giving her time to adjust to her new surroundings.

Oletta's character is introduced and developed, revealing as much love and warmth as Tallulah had intimated when describing her. Oletta is on the receiving end of an emotional unloading when Cecelia becomes overwhelmed by the feeling that she didn't belong.

The familial theme continues in this segment, but the members have changed. Cecelia begins to see that she has family with Tallulah and Oletta, and she dares to have hope. Oletta has the motherly aura and demeanor that Cecelia never really experienced with her mother, but was able to enjoy once a week with Mrs. Odell.

Friendship is an important theme in this segment. While Cecelia has told herself over and over that she is fine with her own company, a part of her has always longed to have



a girlfriend she can talk to – someone who cares about her and that she can tell anything to. When she comes downstairs, Cecelia feels out of place and homesick, and before she can help herself, she is telling Oletta everything about her history with her parents and the events that led to her being there. Oletta listens to it all, and offers the one thing in life that Cecelia needs more than anything else – her friendship. She gives Cecelia the ‘sugar’ that Cecelia has never had, wrapping her strong arms around her and holding her close, letting her feel safe and secure. For once, Cecelia is allowed to be a child. When the chair collapses under their combined weight, Oletta jokes about it and together they are laughing with abandon shortly after. It is this event that helps Cecelia to believe that she has finally found a friend.

Discussion Question 1

How does Cecelia feel when she first meets her great-aunt Tallulah, and what does Tallulah say that sticks with Cecelia, causing her to cry?

Discussion Question 2

What happens that surprises Cecelia before she leaves with Aunt Tootie and what decision does she make as a result?

Discussion Question 3

What memory comes back to Cecelia as she is sitting down to breakfast on her first morning in Savannah and how does it compare with the breakfast she is served now?

Vocabulary

inadequate, catapulting, overwhelming, ceremoniously, involuntary, autobiography



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

Aunt Tootie takes Cecelia to Forsythe Park where they talk and feed the birds and squirrels. She tells Cecelia how many of the large, heritage style houses in the area had fallen into disrepair and how she'd been given the first one by her husband Taylor. After restoring it, and planting the gardens herself, Tallulah founded the Ladies of Savannah Garden Club.

Later, Cecelia watches Oletta make beaten biscuits. Violene Hobbs arrives, announcing she wants to be the first to welcome Cecelia and to Cecelia's surprise, she asks her how her mother managed to get hit by a truck. Then Violene suggests unkindly that Cecelia needs a haircut. In the background, Oletta beats the biscuits more ferociously by the minute while Cecelia struggles not to slap Violene's hand away from touching her ponytail. Just before Violene leaves she insists that Oletta drop by with some of her wonderful biscuits, reminding her that she had neglected to do so the last time.

Tallulah comes home to announce that the Historic Savannah Foundation had managed to save the Pemberton house by raising enough money to purchase it. She had also gone shopping and bought Cecelia everything from sneakers to pajamas. Over a dozen bags contained an unimaginable array of clothing. Last of all is a pale blue box and shaking, Cecelia opens it to find a white party dress that looks like a miniature of the one her mother wore in the picture in her scrapbook. Her aunt's voice startles her and she puts a smile on her face and thanks Aunt Tootie for everything she's brought home. Tallulah suggests they go to a movie and asks if her mother used to take her from time to time. Cecelia tells her that Mrs. Odell had taken her a few times and Tallulah asks her what kinds of things she did with her mother for fun, but Cecelia isn't able to answer. Tallulah tells her that she thinks it's time to talk about her mother, but Cecelia isn't ready. After her aunt leaves the room Cecelia takes out her mother's scrapbook and looks at the pageant dress – the dress her mother wore on the day she died. There are some differences, but the similarities are eerie.

On Friday, the groundskeepers came. Cecelia reads a Nancy Drew book to Oletta who tells her she has a nice voice and reads very well. Thelma Rae Goodpepper comes over and introduces herself, blaming the heavenly smell of Oletta's baking for her intrusion. Oletta is pleased by the compliment and promises to bring some over when they've cooled. Thelma Rae laments the fact that she didn't steal Oletta away from Tallulah right from the start.

Later, Oletta put three cinnamon buns on a plate and asks Cecelia to take them over. Cecelia is nervous at first but with Oletta's urging she follows directions to the path at the side of the garden, hoping to put them on her back porch and get home without anyone seeing her. The yard is beautiful, with so much color and life and classical music plays in the background. The house is a monstrosity of stone and a peacock is



wandering around a sunny spot on the lawn. She hears a splash and Thelma Rae's head pops up. She grabs a towel and invites Cecelia in to have a look. On a marble pad sits a claw-foot bathtub, suds draining away. Cecelia hands her the plate and Thelma Rae invites her to come in, taking her into the library. A huge cage hangs there and Thelma Rae says it reminds her of what freedom is. She invites Cecelia to take whatever appeals to her, and Cecelia is amazed by the amount of books and varied subjects. In no time, she has twenty books and then narrows them down to seven. They sit outside together for a while, talking about plants and nature, and the relationship music has. She talks about His Holiness, the Dalai Lama and about karma giving Cecelia the example of the magnolia tree that was now just a stump – murdered, she says, by Violene Hobbs. Calling her the black widow of Savannah, she warns Cecelia to stay away from her because she is pure evil. Thelma Rae is convinced that the boomerang of karma was going to find Violene.

Cecelia has a lot to think about. She wondered about a holy man named after a llama, and the boomerang of karma. One thing was for sure. The world she'd been dropped in seemed to be run by women.

Analysis

Friendship is an ongoing theme, especially in Cecelia's mind. She listens as Aunt Tootie describes her meetings with seven of her best friends every month and how they talk and laugh and Cecelia can't imagine having that many girlfriends. She has always wanted one, and often thought of how much richer her life would be with someone to share it.

Violene Hobbs is introduced and revealed as a petty and self-absorbed woman who has no control over her mouth or mind. She insults and belittles Cecelia in the first few moments after they met, seemingly without realizing it, but missing or ignoring the obvious cues to her mistakes such as Oletta's increasingly forceful beating of her biscuit dough or the look on Cecelia's face as her verbal diatribe continues. After she leaves, Oletta stops just long enough to say Jesus will join them for dinner before she shares a single biscuit with Violene Hobbs and warns Cecelia to be careful what she says around her as anything she reveals will be Savannah gossip the same day. This comment subtly implies first-hand knowledge of a verbal pipeline, having been a victim of her gossip, or known someone close to her that has.

The past is an ongoing theme, particularly in how it affects our behavior in the present. An example is given with Cecelia when Tallulah buys her a closet full of clothing including a white pageant dress. Cecelia sees the dress, and associates it with her mother, seeing her in a myriad of situations including but not limited to her last day on earth. For a moment, she remembers one of her mother's episodes during which she'd come home to find her mother's pageant dress on the ironing board. She knew immediately that her mother was in trouble, making the association by the presence of the dress itself. She finds her mother standing on a hassock stark naked, her face plastered with cold cream, and talking into a wooden spoon as though it were a



microphone. The fact that her mother had been wearing the white pageant dress when she was hit and killed is something Cecelia is unable to wipe from her mind and the new dress purchased by her aunt is so similar that she can't help but wonder if the past is destined to repeat itself. As such, she can hardly even look at the dress, and hides it in the back of the closet.

Embarrassment is a theme that follows Cecelia as she goes through her young life, trying to explain or understand her mother's erratic behavior. She has no way of explaining what living with her mother was like. She has no idea how to tell people that living with her mother was the equivalent of dealing with a 'hurricane stuffed in a closet'. Cecelia knows enough to know that her life was not normal and that most people had very different upbringing.

History and preservation are also strong themes in this segment as Tallulah is revealed to be the spearhead of the Historical Savannah Foundation which is devoted to saving heritage homes and buildings from the wrecker's ball. Her husband begins the process by buying the first heritage house for her and after its restoration; Tallulah begins to take active action to prevent the destruction of others.

Thelma Rae Goodpepper is introduced and describes as everything Violen Hobbs is not. They are revealed as neighbors but Thelma Rae is filled with animosity for the woman she insists murdered the Magnolia tree between them while she was out of town. This reveals another side of Thelma Rae who has already been described as elegant, mysterious, and exotic.

Educated and intelligent continue to be ways in which Cecelia is described or thought of. She reads to Oletta who is surprised by how articulate she is and Thelma Rae offers her the unbridled use of her library and its contents.

Thelma Rae is also a follower of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, telling Cecelia about the relationship between nature and people, and explaining karma, which she tells Cecelia comes from the sum of all we've thought, done or said in life whether it is bad or good. Not only does this give Cecelia a great deal to think about, it also foreshadows karmic justice coming.

Discussion Question 1

What foundation does Tallulah start; what is its purpose and what accomplishment is she particularly proud of?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Cecelia so intimidated by Thelma Rae and how does that compare to how she felt when she met Violen Hobbs for the first time?



Discussion Question 3

How does Thelma Rae describe karma and what is her basic philosophy in life?

Vocabulary

inflicting, graciousness, bludgeoning, debutantes, ambrosia, mausoleum, sacrilege



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

Cecelia oversleeps and, coming down the stairs, she hears Aunt Tootie expressing her concerns with Oletta that Cecelia refuses to talk about her mother and shows no grief. Oletta admits that Cecelia had spoken to her once, and assures her that Cecelia will grieve when she is ready. Cecelia wishes her aunt would just leave things alone.

Tallulah takes Cecelia out for breakfast and while sitting there, they hear two men discussing the demolition of the old Pemberton house, saying that by nightfall it will be destroyed. Tallulah turns and confirms that it is the Pemberton place they are discussing, and then hurries Cecelia out to the car. She drives to a phone booth and makes a call before speeding to the Pemberton house, bemoaning the way we have become a society that throws everything away.

A large crane and ball are in the front of the house and the operator is starting the engine as Tallulah tries talking to the man in charge, Grady Tucker. Despite the fact that they'd purchased the house, the scheduled demolition is about to continue but Tallulah marches over to the house causing him to stop. Cars begin arriving, women surrounding the foreman and telling him he has no right to touch the house. A policeman shows up next, and looks at the permit for demolition just as T. Johnson Fuller arrives as the attorney representing the Foundation. In short order, he offers to sort everything out, and Cecelia can almost hear the house groan with relief at the reprieve.

Tallulah shows Cecelia the house, and at first Cecelia can't see anything all that special about the place. Tallulah points out chandeliers; the fireplaces that were made from two solid chunks of marble and the flowers that were hand carved down both sides and her enthusiasm is catching. Tallulah admits that saving houses is her fire, and that most of all, she hopes that Cecelia finds her fire because that is where real happiness lies. Cecelia wonders if her mother would still be alive if she'd found her fire and if she had found it, who or what had put it out.

A letter from Mrs. Odell comes in the mail and Cecelia is thrilled to hear from her. After she reads the note inside, Tallulah gives Cecelia another box containing an instant Polaroid camera. Cecelia kisses her cheek and that evening Cecelia begins taking pictures of things that catch her eye. Tallulah asks her if she'd like to join her for lunch with her sister Lucille the next day, and Cecelia accepts.

On the way to Brunswick, Tallulah tells Cecelia a bit about her aunt Lucille who welcomes them warmly when they arrive. The clock strikes noon and Aunt Lu pulls two nickels from the register and puts them into the parking meter outside. Then they help her haul out chairs and a table. Rosa arrives shortly afterward. With a little prompting, Rosa tells Cecelia the origin of the parking spot lunch, and then tells her about the day that she mistakenly fried her hair. They all laugh and when the parking meter time is up,



Rosa announces it is time to go back to work. Cecelia takes a picture of Rosa and Aunt Lucille before they leave and wonders if she'll ever have a friend like that.

Two weeks later, Rosa calls to tell them that Lucille had passed away. They were sitting having lunch at the card table as usual and had just told Rosa that she planned to retire and buy her own purple sofa. They were still laughing about it when Lucille stiffens, and dies of a brain aneurism just as the time on the meter expired. The next afternoon, Cecelia and Tallulah drove to Brunswick to make funeral arrangements. Tallulah picks out a casket and makes a stop at Joe Bodacci and Son Construction Company before heading to Rosa's. Rosa adopts Napoleon and they sit at the table sharing stories about Lucille; laughing and crying together.

A knock on the door reveals what Tallulah had done at the construction company as Mr. Bodacci and his son come in with the framed front window of Brunswick Fine Jewelers. They hang it carefully over the sofa.

For days after the funeral, friends would stop by offering their condolences and Cecelia sees that Tallulah is weighted down by sadness, but is unable to go out and sit with her, unable to give her the comfort that she'd given to her so freely. One morning, she hears the garden wagon, and Cecelia goes down to help her.

Analysis

Loss is at the forefront as a theme in this segment as well. Tallulah is disturbed by the fact that Cecelia seems to exhibit no grief where her mother's death is concerned, keeping her thoughts and feelings to herself. Oletta believes that she will work things out in her own good time.

Historical preservation continues to be a theme in this segment as well. Tallulah learns that a wrecking ball is about to begin work on the Pemberton house and calls for help. She tells Cecelia that society now throws everything away, and has no use for places no value on the accomplishments of the past. She takes Cecelia through the Pemberton house after managing to stop the demolition, and shows her some of the treasures inside that their Foundation is trying to salvage.

Compassion is also a theme that is ongoing as Tallulah greets the policeman by name and inquires after the health of his mother after she'd had her gall bladder removed revealing that her compassion for those around her extends beyond family like Cecelia. She'd sent flowers as well, and he assures her they were appreciated.

Fire is also examined; fire for a cause; fire for life; fire for recognizing opportunity and fire to find happiness in life. This fire is the fire of purpose and according to Tallulah, when one is without it life is flat and meaningless. Finding what drives you. That is what fire for life is.

Examples of friendship are given once again as Mrs. Odell takes the time to write to Cecelia, telling her she missed their Sunday breakfasts, and hoping she writes back.



Aunt Tootie continues with another example of friendship, presenting Cecelia with an instant Polaroid camera. Tallulah adds to Cecelia's self-confidence by telling her that she has a good eye for taking photos, so much so that she plans to frame one of them and put it on her desk. Including her in the visit she plans to make to Brunswick also bolsters Cecelia's self-confidence and self-worth. Cecelia has never known the pleasure of pure friendship, and Tallulah's inclusion is important.

The family theme continues when Tallulah takes Cecelia with her to meet her sister Lucille. Lucille is introduced as Aunt Lu and on the way to Brunswick Tallulah gives Cecelia an idea of who her Aunt Lu is by telling her a bit about her. Rosa is also introduced as Lucille's best friend and their ritual of daily street picnics is explained to Cecelia. Both women have had bad experiences with men, and both have sworn off of them as a result. Their friendship is as strong as any marriage, without the chance that either will take advantage of the other.

A purple velvet sofa is used as a symbol of freedom and independence, Rosa having purchased one after renting a place of her own when she ended her marriage to Frank. Rosa uses symbolism to describe the jewelry store as well, calling it the place where friendship can be found and insisting that there is nothing better than a good friend.

Cecelia takes a photo of Aunt Lu and Rosa, foreshadowing a separation of the friendship that she captured, wishing that one day she would have a purple velvet sofa kind of friend as well – a friend who loves her regardless of her secrets, hopes and fears.

It is ironic that Tallulah should suffer the loss of her sister Lucille, and be intimately acquainted with how personal loss can be. After Lucille is buried, Tallulah spends a considerable amount of time by herself, like Cecelia, not ready to share the depth of her grief with anyone else. Cecelia is still unable to feel the kind of grief that Tallulah feels, unwilling to even examine the reasons that she closed herself off to the grief and pain. As such, despite all that Tallulah had done for her, Cecelia is unable to even sit beside her and comfort her.

Gardening and new growth symbolize the end of mourning and the beginning of new life as Aunt Tootie sets aside some of her grief so that she work. Cecelia offers her help, and in that moment returns the friendship so freely given to her since she'd arrived. Aunt Tootie explains that the wind was something Lucille loved, believing it was nature's way of blowing sorrow away and smiling as though Lucille had sent the wind herself in an effort to alleviate her sister's grief.

Discussion Question 1

What is Tallulah worried about where Cecelia is concerned, and what advice does Oletta offer her?



Discussion Question 2

What does Tallulah learn in the restaurant and what does she do about it?

Discussion Question 3

What is a street picnic and how and why did they begin?

Vocabulary

demolition, injunction, bouffant, lacquered, cavalcade, depilatories, mortified



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

Cecelia is reading one of the books Mrs. Goodpepper loaned her when she comes across a Confederate dollar dated 1861 and she crosses the back yard to return it to her. She finds Thelma Rae collecting slugs in a jar, and then using a spatula to flip them over the fence and into Mrs. Hobb's back yard. She tells Cecelia that with any luck, the slugs will eat half of her garden by morning. Right then, Violene comes out her back door described by Thelma Rae as looking like a 'centerfold in a poultry catalog'.

A man wearing a Zorro mask follows her out, twirling her brassiere over his head and asking Violene to strip for him again. She tries to retrieve it from him but he throws it into the shrubbery. He grabs for her and giggling, she runs across the porch in high heeled shoes. Thelma Rae whispers that the man is Earl Jenkins – a married policeman, laughing into her hands. Next door, Violene runs from Earl, and without warning her feet come out from under her and she is suddenly airborne, landing hard at the bottom of the stairs. Earl runs to her, no longer laughing, but Violene doesn't respond. He runs inside and comes back a moment later wearing his uniform. He notices her head is bleeding and tells her his is going to say he found her that way, hoping she'll confirm his story later. A siren draws near and shortly afterward, two policemen arrive. One of them notices a slug squashed on the bottom of one shoe, and says it is the likely culprit after commenting that Violene is dressed like a half plucked chicken.

Thelma Rae can't help but snort, drawing a policeman down to look with his flashlight, but finding nothing, he heads back to the house. A few minutes later, the ambulance arrives and they take Violene away on a stretcher. Thelma Rae and Cecelia stay put until everyone is gone. Cecelia asks if Violene is dead, but Thelma Rae assures her it will take more than that to kill her. Cecelia asks if her slipping on the slug might be an example of karma and Thelma Rae turns to her, telling her she is a very smart child.

The next morning, Cecelia sneaks back across Thelma Rae's yard and looks through the hedge to Violene's back yard. She sees the blood stain almost the size of a platter, and is wondering how she could survive that much blood loss when she hears air brakes and peeks out just in time to see Oletta arriving. As fast as she can, Cecelia sneaks back into the house, barely making it before Oletta comes in. She takes a shower and coming downstairs, she can hear them talking about Violene. Cecelia goes out the front door and sits on the stoop thinking about trials, sentencing and feeling low.

Oletta comes out and asks her why she looks so hangdog, and Cecelia tells her that she is waiting to talk to Tallulah when she is off the phone. She follows Oletta in and instead of discussing what had happened the night before, Tallulah tells her that a friend of hers had suffered a stroke and she would be driving to Raleigh as soon as possible, but that Oletta had agreed to stay with her. Cecelia decides this isn't the time to mention Violene's accident and sits down to eat breakfast. She almost chokes on her waffles



when Oletta reads the morning paper out loud - the front page story about Violene and how she suffered a concussion caused by a slug. Oletta jokes with Tallulah about sending Belladonna when she mentions sending flowers.

Tallulah takes Oletta home to pack a bag and while she and Cecelia are there, she goes to a vegetable stand. Inside Cecelia notices a picture with a cross hanging from it, and Oletta tells her that the man in the photo is Martin Luther King. On the table is a photo of her daughter, Jewel who died at the age of thirteen after contracting spinal meningitis. Oletta quickly packs, handing Cecelia a metal detector that she calls her fortune finder. She tells Cecelia that they might go to Tybee Island while Tallulah is gone.

Tallulah picks them up again and once home they see Mrs. Goodpepper coming through the garden waving a letter the mailman brought to her by mistake. She is dressed up to attend an art show, and asks Tallulah if she knew that Cecelia stopped in to see her the night before, bringing her an old twenty dollar bill she found in a book. She mentions that she and Cecelia are becoming good friends, and Cecelia feels sure that Thelma Rae is testing her. Tallulah asks her if she'd seen the morning paper, and when she admits she hasn't, Tallulah tells her about the story involving Violene. Thelma Rae insists Violene is so thick headed that she'll probably be fine. Cecelia thinks about Thelma Rae and considers her a mystery – funny, wise and kind on one hand and dangerous and formidable on the other. Cecelia is sure she never wants to fall out of her favor.

Analysis

Conscience is a theme as Cecelia has repeated opportunities to choose honesty over dishonesty; good over bad; and loyalty over disloyalty. The first knock at her conscience comes when Cecelia finds a confederate twenty dollar bill in a book that she'd borrowed from Thelma Rae. Rather than simply pocket the money she finds, Cecelia opts to take it back to its rightful owner. There, she gets another knock at her conscience when she finds Ms. Goodpepper flinging slugs over the hedge to Violene Hobb's garden. Fate intervenes and Violene slips on a slug, splitting her skull and getting a serious concussion. Cecelia almost confesses the fact that she witnessed the action that caused the slugs to be there, but she doesn't want to add to Tallulah's grief over her friend who'd suffered a stroke. When Thelma Rae acts ignorant of anything happening next door, Cecelia decides that Ms. Goodpepper is not the kind of person she would want to be on the wrong side of. This does present a dilemma for Cecelia, however, whose instincts told her to be honest about the event but she stayed silent. In this way, honesty and loyalty are at odds with each other.

Fate is a theme with fingers in all aspects of this segment beginning with Cecelia finding the Confederate bill in the book she was reading. She chose that particular book, reading that particular page, and then making the decision to return the bill to Thelma Rae and by doing so, becomes complicit in the slug slinging events that lead to Violene's concussion. Violene just happens to go out at the same time as Thelma Rae is flinging slugs and just happens to step on one that causes her to fall and crack open



her skull. This just happened to occur when policeman Earl Jenkins was at her home. His presence and quick call to a rescue unit likely saves Violené's life. All of this creates Cecelia's conflict as she prepares to confess all; wracked with guilt, and discovers that Tallulah has more important things on her mind at the moment. Fate would seem to have put a finger in once again, as Tallulah gets a call to tell her that her college friend had a stroke. Cecelia decides not to add to her Aunt's troubles and keeps her secret to the obvious delight of Thelma Rae who drops by later to test the waters and see how much Cecelia gave away.

Thelma Rae's character is developed and honed, a mystery to Cecelia. She was as funny, as kind and as wise as she was dangerous, dark and formidable. This alternate side to Thelma Rae unnerves Cecelia and makes her wary.

Friendship is an ongoing theme as well. Cecelia continues to make friends living with Tallulah. Her first friend is of course Oletta, but it is safe to say that Thelma Rae is becoming a friend as well. Cecelia is learning the differences of those friendships however, and noting the complexities that a friendship can take.

Cecelia deciding that she doesn't ever want to fall out of favor with Ms. Goodpepper foreshadows exactly that occurring in her future, and will likely involve her loyalties to Tallulah and/or Oletta.

Discussion Question 1

What action does Cecelia become complicit in when she decides to return the Confederate bill; whose loyalties to whom are tested as a result and how?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Cecelia decide to confess all to Tallulah and Oletta; what happens that changes her mind and why?

Discussion Question 3

What insights does Cecelia gain into Thelma Rae's personality and what does she know for certain after learning them?

Vocabulary

catapulted, stupefied, perpetrator, triumphantly, envisioning, concussion, inquisitive, formidable



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

Tallulah hates to leave Cecelia, but she assures her aunt that she understands. Tallulah gives her a brand new dictionary the day before she goes, and when the doorbell rings Cecelia answers it, stunned to find her father standing on the stoop. He tells her he is on his way to Chattanooga, and decided to take the long way so that he could stop in and see her. He asks her how she likes Savannah, but Cecelia doesn't answer. Oletta comes up behind her and puts her hands on Cecelia's shoulders. She sends Cecelia upstairs to get her aunt and closes the door in her father's face. When Tallulah comes down, her reception is equally cold, inviting him in and asking Oletta to bring them iced tea. Tallulah leaves Cecelia to talk to him, assuring her she is in the library if needed. He tries to make conversation, and even attempts an apology for his cowardly behavior, but Cecelia is cold and unyielding. He goes out to the car and Cecelia is surprised to see that he'd brought all of her books. Without a word they unload them, Cecelia barely able to apologize. She won't even let him help her bring them in. He tries again to explain his behavior but all Cecelia wants is the truth. She asks him if he has a girlfriend and when he all but admits it to her; she closes herself off to him completely. He offers her a piece of paper with his new address and telephone number, in case she ever wants to talk to him, but when she won't take it, he puts it on the top of one of the boxes. As he pulls away, the paper is blown into the street, and Cecelia leaves it there watching the familiar sight of her father leaving again.

Tallulah is even more reluctant to go, but Cecelia assures her she is fine. As soon as she leaves with Estelle, Oletta gets on the phone and a few minutes later everything is set. She tells Cecelia that Nadine and Chessie will take them treasure hunting at Tybee Island. Cecelia is thrilled, having never seen the ocean. The next morning the alarm goes off early and by the time Cecelia gets downstairs Oletta is already packing a cooler. The phone rings and Oletta answers to learn that Nadine's car won't start so they won't be able to go. Cecelia is so disappointed until the idea comes to her that they could take Aunt Tootie's car. Oletta hasn't driven in years and although Nadine could drive, she had no way of getting to them to do so. Tallulah calls just then and Cecelia tells her about their situation, asking if Oletta can borrow her car. Oletta shakes her head no immediately. Tallulah asks to speak to her and after hanging up she warns Cecelia never to speak for her again. She apologizes, and Oletta goes on to say she isn't going to drive. Cecelia is sheepish when she apologizes again, this time for pushing Oletta when it was clear that she was afraid to drive. She assures Cecelia angrily that she isn't afraid, but that she just isn't that good a driver. Cecelia tries another tactic, asking her about the treasures she'd found in the past and Oletta changes her mind, deciding that this early there would be few cars on the road.

Oletta calls Nadine and they load the car. Oletta has only gone three blocks before her face is beaded with sweat, but once the city is behind them, she seems to relax and even enjoy the trip. They finally pull into a narrow driveway where a small sign



advertises jewelry by Nadine and stone readings by Chessie. Oletta parks the car and Nadine comes out, surprised to see them there. Chessie comes around the corner and at first Cecelia thinks she is a man, but their smiles are so similar that Cecelia can finally see the family resemblance. Nadine insists they put the top down, despite Oletta's objections and they finally get on the road, laughing and singing along to the radio. Oletta gives Cecelia pair of red sunglasses shaped like hearts and her own are shaped like cat's eyes with yellow rhinestones. They both look so funny that Cecelia can't help laughing and can see what Oletta must have been like when she was young.

Analysis

Family is a theme with many strings throughout this segment beginning with Tallulah who is worried about having to leave Cecelia to support another friend who is in the hospital in Raleigh. To add to her concerns, Cecelia's father shows up unannounced and tries to mend some of the damage he's done to her over the years with an apology. Cecelia wants nothing to do with her father at this point, resenting him for leaving her to handle her mother by herself, and for lacking the courage to be honest with her about his time away from them. She confronts him about his unfaithfulness to both her and her mother, and while he tries to excuse his behavior, Cecelia sees right through him. Cecelia is surprised when he opens his trunk and reveals her books, showing that he did actually pay attention despite how little time he spent with her. It was the nicest thing he'd ever done for her despite the fact that she still thought he was a jerk. He hopes that she'll decide to contact him, but she makes no effort to retrieve the information he left written down and taken by the wind.

Sisters Nadine and Chessie are introduced and Cecelia sees the similarities and differences in the sisters. This is another new experience for Cecelia as she grew up without the benefit of a sister or brother to share experiences with. It is a different turn on the family theme.

Friendship and trust are strong themes here as Tallulah agrees to allow Oletta to drive her baby - the Packard convertible to take Cecelia to the ocean at Tybee Island despite being aware that Oletta has not driven in years. Friendship continues to reveal itself as Oletta overcomes her reluctance to drive so that she can fulfill her promise to take Cecelia to the ocean – something she had never seen before. They pick up Nadine and Chessie on the way, Cecelia able to watch the interaction of girlfriends at play. Their inclusion of Cecelia is something else she has never experienced.

Luck is also a theme as both Oletta and Nadine have metal detectors and hope to find something on the beach. Oletta is lucky, finding an old hat pin, but it is that desire for a lucky find that drives Oletta and Nadine to comb the beaches with their 'treasure finders'.

Freedom and the expression of it are obvious as the girls begin to unwind as they head to Tybee Island. Nadine puts the top down, despite Oletta's strenuous objections, the



radio is turned on and they all sing along, moving to the music and donning wild sunglasses with Oletta insisting 'there ain't nobody cooler'.

As is usually the case, this outing is going far too well, and likely foreshadows the destruction of Tallulah's beloved Packard or some other event that takes the pleasure out of the afternoon, especially as even Oletta admits that 'if we get there in one piece, it'll be a miracle', and she feels 'trouble is just waitin' on us'.

Discussion Question 1

How does Cecelia feel about her father's visit, and how does she leave things with him?

Discussion Question 2

What does Oletta overcome in order to take Cecelia to Tybee Island and what else prods her to go as well?

Discussion Question 3

What 'firsts' is Cecelia exposed to on this trip and how does she react or feel about them?

Vocabulary

astonishment, sheepishly, loathing, reluctantly, resentment, tentative



Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

Nadine turns down a road lined with cottages and parks. They empty the car and Cecelia and Chessie follow Oletta and Nadine down the path. Cecelia's first look at the ocean leaves her awestruck and when Oletta warns her about the dangers of the waves, Cecelia assures her she won't go in as she can't swim. She asks Oletta if she'll teach her, but Oletta refuses to teach her in the ocean, suggesting she learn in a pond or pool first. Instead, she invites Cecelia to go treasure hunting with her.

Nadine takes her fortune finder up as well while Chessie sits down with a magazine. As Cecelia walks along, Oletta tells her about the times when colored folks weren't allowed on the island unless they worked there. Cecelia soon tires of digging up old bottle caps and tangled wire, asking Oletta if she has a boyfriend. Oletta admits she lost interest in men just as the fortune finder begins to make noise. Cecelia digs and at first finds nothing, but Oletta encourages her to continue looking and surprised, Cecelia pulls out an old hatpin. They go back to where the others are sitting, and Nadine gives Cecelia a bracelet she made for her. Meanwhile, Chessie stands in the ocean with her bag of stones, allowing water to wash away former readings done with them.

Chessie spreads the stones out in front of her, and tells Cecelia the story of their existence and how her great-great-great grandmother Omu had carved the intricate designs on them. Now, the stones tell the truth, she tells Cecelia. She tells Cecelia to empty her mind, close her eyes and touch each stone until one speaks to her. She selects a stone Chessie calls Jakuni which reveals that she has protection all around her.

After lunch, Cecelia goes down to the water, thinking about Omu. Nadine joins her and offers to make her a necklace as well. Cecelia admires the one she is wearing and Nadine tells her the diamond was a gift from her husband on her fiftieth birthday. Noticing she is getting pink, they head back and just as they pass under a stand of trees, a man steps out brandishing a knife. He rips her necklace off and takes her watch, telling her if they make a sound, they're dead. Chessie comes into view, swinging her bag of stones faster and faster. He lunges at her and she hits him across the face. Blood oozes from his face and they leave him moaning on the ground. They run for the car, pile in and drive away, Oletta telling Nadine to stop so they can call the police, but Nadine knows they won't take the word of some black women over the word of a white man, so they continue without stopping.

Cecelia feels sick. They unload the car and she sits with the others at the table as they agree that he deserved much worse than he got. Cecelia goes into the bathroom and empties her stomach. After Taye picks Nadine and Chessie up, Oletta and Cecelia stay busy, but her mind is a fog. She asks Oletta if they are safe, and though she assures Cecelia they are, Cecelia is still changed by the experience. She follows Oletta around



as she locks windows and doors, and even then is afraid to go to sleep. Finally, she takes her pillow and curls up on the floor next to Oletta's bed. Reaching up, she takes Oletta's hand and is finally able to relax.

For days after the attack Cecelia hovers around Oletta, afraid to be alone even for a moment. Oletta explains that as she remains fearful, their attacker is stronger and she insists that Cecelia take back her power. Oletta sends her outside to clip a nice bouquet, adding that she wants roses from the side of the house, out of sight. When she refuses, Cecelia manages to do it, but her fear follows her every step of the way. They go back inside just as Chessie and Nadine arrive, asking Oletta if she's seen the morning paper. Oletta sends her up to her room while she talks to them, despite Cecelia's obvious reluctance. Then Oletta reads the newspaper. The man who robbed Nadine was claiming that he'd been attacked by a group of colored folk and he had connections to the Klan revealed by the tattoo of a black cross inside a red circle. Nadine begs Oletta not to tell Tallulah and despite her reservations, Oletta agrees. They decide to give the problem to God, and holding hands they pray together. Cecelia had crept back down and listened, but then hurried back to her room. Later she sees the newspaper in the garbage and reads about how Lucas Slade, aged 34 was attacked while a young white girl watched. She realizes that Lucas is trying to frame Nadine and Chessie and her anger overcomes her fear. She tells Oletta that she is fine now, and that he no longer has any power over her. The look she gives Cecelia tells her right away that somehow Oletta knew that she'd heard their conversation, and Cecelia can see the anger and a trace of fear in her eyes. She tells Oletta that they can't tell Aunt Tootie and that she will never say anything more on the subject to anyone. Oletta just barely nods before turning back to her chores.

Analysis

Contradictions are a theme as Cecelia sees the ocean for the first time. She is awe-struck by the combination of beauty and danger that are revealed, her first impressions keeping her away from the water as she has no idea how to swim.

History and segregation are discussed as Oletta tells Cecelia stories of her childhood memories, including those that prevented her from coming to the beach when colored people weren't allowed to mingle with white folks. She describes how a group of black children went swimming and were taken to jail, but protests led to the desegregation of the area, and she, Chessie and Nadine had been coming ever since.

Prejudice and segregation continue as themes when Chessie tells the story of Omu – her great, great, great grandmother who originally empowered the stones that were decorated by designs she carved into them. The story reveals how Omu was taken by slavers and sold to a plantation owner in America. The story gives Cecelia another personal perspective on the history of black people and their treatment by those who were white. It is both appalling and difficult for her to believe the degree of prejudice. Her eyes will be opened further still when they are ready to leave the beach and are held up by Lucas Slade – a man whose prejudice is both bold and frightening. A



member of the KKK, as revealed by his tattoo, he holds Nadine at knifepoint, calling her derogatory names and taking her necklace and her watch before Chessie steps in and knocks him down with her bag of stones. While the stones didn't have the power to save Omu, they certainly came into use when Nadine was in trouble.

Nadine and Chessie reveal their generous natures, Nadine giving Cecelia a bracelet she made for her and Chessie giving her a stone reading before lunch. Their friendship is a surprise to Cecelia who has never had a real friend before. She is constantly amazed that anyone would like her enough to be her friend.

Truth and consequences are a theme as are secrets and the need to keep them. Nadine states the obvious fact that no policeman will take the word of three black women against a white man and Chessie immediately agrees. They realize that although black people have the same rights and freedoms as white people do where the law is concerned, the truth is that prejudice is still strong in the South. Oletta wants to tell Tallulah what happened, if for no other reason than to explain Cecelia's nervous and paranoid behavior, but again Chessie and Nadine make her promise to keep their secret. While Oletta knows that Tallulah holds no prejudice against black folks, Oletta agrees that Tallulah would go out of her way to try to help. Cecelia realizes that despite the passage of almost 200 years since Omu was taken from her home and held in slavery, very little had changed for black people.

Intelligence is an ongoing theme as Cecelia realizes that Oletta knows most everything that was worth knowing and despite her lack of education by books she is the most intelligent woman Cecelia has ever met.

Prayer, and the strength of belief is a theme that reveals itself again in this segment as Cecelia witnesses a group prayer by Nadine, Chessie and Oletta, asking God for help and guidance. They accepted that they'd done all they could about the situation and had no choice but to give the matter to God for resolution. Cecelia considers what Mrs. Odell had once told her – that God watches over us, and wonders how He could allow such awful things to happen to good people if He had so much power. She considers how people prayed, built churches and yet still had bad things happen.

Fear and the power it can hold over us is ongoing as Cecelia battles her fear of everything after they return home. Cecelia glues herself to Oletta, afraid to be alone inside or out. When Oletta realizes the depth of Cecelia's fear, she explains that by giving into her fears, Cecelia allows the man who robbed Nadine to win. She encourages her to reclaim her power before she became a prisoner for life. Oletta educates Cecelia in how to walk as though she is without fear, even when she feels it, and to hold her head up proudly. Her fear turns to anger when she reads the newspaper article in which Lucas Slade accuses a group of black people of robbing him and beating him in the hopes that he would flush out who they were and get even. She tells Oletta that he no longer has any power over her, revealing in that moment that she'd eavesdropped on their conversation. Though Cecelia knows that Oletta is aware of her disobedience, she continues determined to make her understand that she would never speak a word of this event again.



Discussion Question 1

What examples of prejudice are given in this segment and how have things changed since then?

Discussion Question 2

How does Cecelia overcome her fear of everything after Nadine was robbed on the path near the beach?

Discussion Question 3

What indiscretion does Cecelia reveal when she overcomes her fear and replaces it with anger, and how does Oletta know?

Vocabulary

imminent, profoundness, enthralled, ominous, tribunal, imperceptible



Chapters 17 - 18

Summary

Saturday morning dawns with Tallulah still in Raleigh. Cecelia and Oletta have breakfast and Oletta reveals she is going to visit her Aunt Sapphire, and will take the bus before 11 a.m. Nadine had agreed to come and stay with her, but Cecelia begs Oletta to take her along. Oletta believes she has no choice but to tell Tallulah the truth when she returns based on Cecelia's ongoing fear of separation, but Cecelia assures her that is not the case and that she just wants to go with her.

The ride by bus is hot and sticky, just as Oletta predicted, but the visit is one filled with surprises for Cecelia. She meets Oletta's Aunt Sapphire, and several of the other residents of the home, and watching their interactions and unbridled joy over life's most simple things, Cecelia realizes that the home really is a wonderful world in which reality and imagination are one and the same. It makes her think about her mother and how it seemed that she was always happiest when she was deep in her own world of imagination and beauty pageants. She wonders if her father had listened to her and put her mother in a home like this one whether or not she'd still be alive, and believes she would have been. Cecelia plays Chinese checkers with Sapphire, despite missing many of the marbles, and is given a tour of Mrs. Obee's orchid garden.

Later, at home again the telephone rings and Oletta picks it up. Mrs. Goodpepper asks her to repair a tear in a dress she is wearing to a wedding reception. She arrives looking like a lime Popsicle to Cecelia in her green chiffon and Oletta easily stitches the tear without any evidence of her repair and she leaves for the reception happy.

Oletta and Cecelia shower and have dinner together on the porch. Oletta can hear the high school band practicing for Labor Day and she asks Cecelia if she likes parades. Cecelia admits she doesn't and tells Oletta the story of her mother at one Fourth of July parade. Cecelia was eleven at the time. It was a wonderful parade, and was supposed to finish with the wagon float holding "Little Miss Willoughby". Francine Fillmore enjoyed tormenting Cecelia about her mother and she was the girl in the wagon that year. Cecelia couldn't believe it when her mother ran down the road after the wagon in her pageant dress, sash and crown, begging the float to stop for her. The crowd was more than amused, but then Camille leapt for the float and missed, the back of her dress flipped up to reveal she had nothing on underneath. Embarrassed beyond words, Cecelia took her mother home, and never attended another parade again.

Oletta reaches out and takes her hand, without saying a word. They sit that way together for some time, Cecelia listening to the sounds of nature – much more aware of them since her move to Savannah. Then Cecelia prods Oletta about learning to swim. She reminds her that Mrs. Hobbs is still in the hospital and her pool is unused. Oletta tells her that if Mrs. Hobbs found out a colored person had been in her pool, she'd pitch a fit and adds that she's heard Mrs. Hobbs call her "Miz Tootie's nigger". Cecelia works



on her until Oletta goes up and grabs an armload of towels. When Cecelia mentions she has no suit, Oletta tells her they are going skinny-dipping.

They get into Violene's pool and Oletta has Cecelia doing the dog paddle in no time. They swim until tired, then hold onto the edge and look at the stars. Cecelia wants to tell Oletta she loves her, practicing the unfamiliar words in her head, but instead asks her if they'd met at the same age, would she have liked her. Oletta is sure she would have, citing how smart and how pretty she is which stuns Cecelia. Oletta talks about her childhood, recalling her dreams of sewing wedding dresses and singing, but when her father died, she had to stay home and care for her siblings, so she learned to cook and at 17 found a job in a restaurant. From there, she heard about a lady who wanted a cook. She made her finest fried chicken and put on her best dress before going to introduce herself. Mr. Taylor answered the door, she remembers smiling, and she was hired that day. She still feels like it was the luckiest day of her life.

After a time, Oletta tells Cecelia it's time to get out of the pool, and when she does, Oletta takes advantage of some free time in the pool by herself. It is a luxury she'd never known, and Cecelia can hardly believe how graceful she is. As Cecelia dries herself off, she happens to see Violene's brassiere, still where Earl had thrown it that night with the slugs. She takes it and hides it in her closet, for reasons she can't explain.

Analysis

The family theme is ever present by in ever-changing forms. This segment introduces Oletta's Aunt Sapphire and her friends at the Green Hills Home for the aged. This is an eye opening experience for Cecelia as she witnesses a collection of people who are all straining at the bounds of reality, and some who live anywhere but, and despite this they are happy and live a good life as far as she can see. In fact, Cecelia can easily see her mother in a place like this one, and believes that had her father listened to her and helped place her mother somewhere like this, she'd still be alive and she'd be happy. The home indulges the fantasies of their residents to a degree, especially if they cause no harm. One resident, Olive Pearson believes she is performing with Louis Armstrong and allowing her to believe it is the only way that the staff can get her to bathe as preparation for her performance. Excited and clean, she belts out her part of What a Wonderful World as the record player looks after the rest, and she is happy. Cecelia can't help but think that here it is wonderful. Mrs. Obee takes marbles from the Chinese checkers game and hides them down her dress, but the other residents pointedly pretend not to notice and play with a reduced number happily. Mrs. Obee also grows orchids in an abandoned car out back. Cecelia learns that sometimes things aren't what they seem when Mrs. Obee shares her secret garden. This dysfunctional family of another kind is happy and Cecelia enjoys her visit immensely. It occurs to her that real friends only 'cherish the good and pretend not to notice the harmless rest'.

Oletta reveals an ongoing capacity for compassion and understanding as she greets all of the residents in the home by name, and knows their eccentricities. She mends



Sapphire's clothes while they talk and then paints her nails with a color called Flames of Passion, to Sapphire's obvious delight.

Cecelia reveals some of her past to Oletta, telling her about the Fourth of July parade that ended all parades for her. Oletta simply holds her hand afterward, and the comfort derived from that simple gesture is immeasurable. The act of recalling the story out loud and allowing someone else to share this burden eases Cecelia's heart and fills it with love for Oletta, her friend.

The separation of white from black in the South is examined briefly as Oletta automatically turns down a swim in a pool – something she's never experienced in her life – simply because her color would so deeply offend Mrs. Hobbs if she found out. She admits to never having had the privilege of swimming in clear, clean water, and Cecelia realizes that although the laws now allow colored people everywhere, the attitudes of some people have not evolved that far. Violene Hobbs is one of those people, and Oletta confesses that she's heard Violene call her Miz. Tootie's nigger. The thought elicits pure hatred in Cecelia for Violene.

Discussion Question 1

Where does Oletta take Cecelia and what observations does she make where the people she meets are concerned?

Discussion Question 2

What secret does Mrs. Obee share with Cecelia and in what way is she reminded of Mrs. Odell?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Cecelia like parades; what story does she share and with whom?

Vocabulary

oscillated, dignified, inquisitive, forlorn, inconspicuous, choreographed, immeasurable



Chapters 19 - 20

Summary

Tallulah returns from Raleigh and asks Cecelia about their day at Tybee Island. Cecelia does her best to act normal, glad when the subject changes. They go to the supermarket and run into Thelma Rae who tells Tallulah that she spoke with Minnie Hayes recently. Two police detectives had walked the neighborhood asking questions and the action seemed to be centered on her neighbors Marilee and Augustus Slade and their son Lucas. Cecelia gulps and later at home waits for an opportunity to talk to Oletta.

That afternoon, she tells Oletta what Thelma Rae had said, and Oletta is ready to tell Tallulah everything right then, but again Cecelia stops her. The next afternoon, a letter comes for Cecelia from Mrs. Odell. Though short and sweet, she tells CeeCee that she loves the picture she'd sent and Cecelia asks if she can go to Forsyth Park to take some more for her, promising not to be gone long. She grabs her camera, hat and sunglasses, and when Mrs. Hobbs brassiere tumbles off the shelf, she puts it in her pocket too. She walks to the Georgia Historical Society and inspiration strikes. She tosses the brassiere over the bronze sign in the yard and snaps a photo. From there, she photographs the brassiere in a number of public places, laughing out loud at some of the photos she takes. Later, when she learns that Mrs. Hobbs is home from the hospital, she begins her campaign to drive Violenne crazy. Cecelia buys some generic paper and envelopes, and takes a page of stamps from Tallulah before composing a brief note from the brassiere, enclosing the photo she'd taken in Chippewa Square before signing it with love from her brassiere and mailing it. Every few days, she sends another one. One day Cecelia sees Earl heading into the café and when no one is looking, she drapes the brassiere over his back bumper and takes a photo clearly displaying the word POLICE. She writes a note and seeing the time, hops into a shower.

When Cecelia comes out she sees Oletta sitting on her bed with the note and photograph and asks Cecelia what she is doing. Cecelia comes clean, telling her everything that happened, beginning with the slugs. Oletta is disappointed beyond words, hardly able to believe that Cecelia had that kind of ugliness inside her. She takes the remaining photos and the brassiere, leaving Cecelia deeply ashamed, and tells her to get dressed and come down. Oletta's silence is agonizing and Cecelia stays out of her way for the rest of the day. Finally, that afternoon Cecelia admits that what she'd done was wrong but Oletta tells her that two wrongs don't make a right. She tells Cecelia she forgives her, but that she is still in a heap of trouble. Her punishment hasn't been decided as yet, however.

Fearing Oletta would leave for the weekend without giving her a hug as usual, Cecelia decides to avoid the possible problem by going out. Cecelia sits at the park, staying out of sight. Other girls ride by on their bikes and Cecelia decides to walk home the long way. Just as she nears Gaston, she sees Oletta heading to the bus stop. She hides



behind a tree, and watches as Oletta takes Cecelia's letter to Mrs. Hobbs out of her purse. She is even more surprised when Oletta seals the envelope and puts it in the mailbox, laughing. Cecelia breathes a sigh of relief, realizing Oletta isn't mad at her anymore.

On Monday morning, it was as if nothing had happened. Two days pass. Then Cecelia hears Aunt Tootie thanking Oletta for putting a casserole and loaf of bread along with some preserves in a basket to wish Violenne well and Oletta immediately volunteers Cecelia to take them over to her. Aunt Tootie tells her that's very thoughtful and she's sure it will brighten her day. A vase of flowers is added and Aunt Tootie cautions Cecelia to make an excuse if she keeps her for over an hour. Walking as slowly as she dares, Cecelia is sure she can hear Oletta laughing inside. Cecelia realizes that this is her black boomerang of karma, circling back around on her. Just as she reaches the door, Violenne opens it grinning. She all but drags Cecelia inside and closes the door, telling Cecelia that she can massage her neck and shoulders which were sore while they talk.

Tallulah and Oletta discuss mundane events as Oletta prepares dinner, and Tallulah asks her if she'd heard about an attack by Negroes on Tybee Island. Oletta admits to having heard a bit about it, but doesn't elaborate. Tallulah gives them all of the information she knows, beginning with his name – Lucas Slade. She goes on to say that since his teenage years, he'd been drinking, doing drugs and stealing cars. He was sent to military school but was expelled. He hadn't been heard from in years when he showed up at his youngest sisters' house recently demanding money and when she had none, he beat her. That happened on the same day as he claimed to have been beaten up on Tybee Island. A detective questioned him in the hospital, but he snapped and grabbed him by the throat. The police arrested him and a search warrant revealed drugs, a bag of jewelry and they also found evidence that Lucas had robbed and killed a man not long before that. Aunt Tootie looks at Cecelia and makes her promise never to do drugs, which she does. Then she takes her tea into the den. Oletta and Cecelia hug each other, Oletta saying 'Praise the Good Lord', and Cecelia 'Amen'.

Analysis

Truth and consequences are themes in this segment again as Cecelia and Oletta continue to keep the secret that they were the group involved in the Tybee Island incident with Lucas Slade. Cecelia struggles when she has to lie directly to her aunt after being asked how their day at the island had been and when Thelma Rae tells Tallulah that the police were parked in front of her neighbors' Augustus and Marilee Slade's house and a detective had been asking questions, Oletta is ready to tell Tallulah the truth. Oletta's conscience weighs on her for withholding the information and she is fearful that her continued silence will have consequences but when Cecelia asks her not to tell, she relents and goes home.

Age is a theme as Thelma Rae reveals the drastic methods she is willing to try in order to retain her youthful appearance. She is detoxifying her body by submerging it in a bath of carrot juice, sea salt and hot water. After that, she is supposed to scrub herself with a



loofah. The Preparation H she is buying at the same time is to reduce the lines under her eyes. As two people who are unconcerned with their 'youthful' appearance, both Tallulah and Cecelia struggle to contain their mirth.

Friendship is an ongoing theme in this segment also as Cecelia relies on her friendship with Oletta to keep their secret safe. It is also present in a different form when Cecelia gets a letter from Mrs. Odell who loves the photo Cecelia sent and inquires as to her life in Savannah. Her love is obvious in every line and the letter inspires Cecelia to take more photos that she might like.

Hatred is a strong theme that is used in several brief instances throughout this story. One of these incidents occurs when Violene's brassiere falls from its hiding place in Cecelia's closet. Cecelia considers the things said and done by Violene – her senseless murder of the Magnolia tree and the ugly expression by which she chooses to call Oletta – and hatred blooms. The loathing she feels gives life to another idea, and Cecelia takes the brassiere with her, beginning Violene's exposure in a brazen brassiere expose.

Guilt and remorse are also themes, but inspired by discovery only. Cecelia doesn't regret sending letters to Violene along with pictures of her brassiere until Oletta discovers what she is doing. While Cecelia feels justified for her actions at first, Oletta points out that the only reason she is doing all of it is 'for ugly's sake'. The look on her face is one of such disappointment that Cecelia doesn't know how to begin to repair the damage she's done.

Disappointment is a theme with weight in this segment as Cecelia learns just how much damage can be done by disappointing a loved one. So far in her life, Cecelia had been disappointed by just about everyone she'd ever known, beginning with her parents. For once in her life, she is in a place where she has two people who care about her and have never let her down. In fact, she'd received so much beyond her expectations from both Oletta and Aunt Tootie that she can't imagine letting them down even in a small way. This was huge and Oletta's disappointment in her hangs over them like a blanket, smothering the trust they shared. What Cecelia only just realizes is that by acting with malice of forethought, she revealed a side of her character that Oletta had never seen before. She'd thought that Cecelia was just about the nicest person she'd ever met. The fact that she had this meanness in her is a surprise and a disappointment to Oletta.

Karma is a subject that Thelma Rae discusses with Cecelia when she is visiting, and the black boomerang of karma is what comes around for the deed that goes around. Cecelia is reminded of that, and taught a valuable lesson when Oletta volunteers her to take a get well basket and a vase of flowers over to Violene Hobbs since she'd come home from the hospital. Cecelia drags her heels the whole way, and is sure that Oletta is laughing inside, but Cecelia realizes that this is her karmic debt. She'd done something mean and spiteful, regardless of the justifications and this was her twisted punishment. She was forced to be pleasant; and rub the neck and shoulders of the woman she so despised.



Another example of the black boomerang of karma can be seen in the tale Tallulah returns with after having lunch with Minnie. Her neighbors son was Lucas Slade and just before he'd been beaten on Tybee Island, Lucas beat his sister because she refused him money. The police searched his home and found drugs, jewelry and guns. It turns out that Lucas had also shot the owner of a watch shop in the spring just past. He will likely spend his life in jail. That, and the beating he took from Nadine's stones, are his black boomerangs of karma for having beaten his sister, shot and robbed a man, and mugged Nadine and likely many others on Tybee Island, and committed multiple other offenses.

Cecelia has turned to religion once in an effort to get help for her mother and herself, using her mother's pearls as prayer beads and now again she considers the effects of her actions to be a black boomerang of karma. As religion isn't introduced with any regularity or consistency, it isn't something that she comes to as a matter of consideration before action but rather something she does as she casts about for an answer or explanation when things are rough.

Drugs are also briefly touched on in this segment; the author taking the opportunity to introduce it when discussing Lucas Slade and his troubled past as well as his lack of future. Tallulah makes Cecelia promise that she will never do drugs – not ever, observing that this is a problem that is increasing and it scares her. This is an obvious example of her love for Cecelia and something she has not known for a long time.

Discussion Question 1

Which locations does the travelling brassiere have a photo taken at that have double meanings and where and what are they?

Discussion Question 2

How does Cecelia earn karmic debt and what is the black boomerang of karma that comes to collect?

Discussion Question 3

What information comes to Oletta and Cecelia that tells them that they have nothing to worry about where Lucas Slade is concerned, and based on this information explain why you think Nadine, Chessie, Oletta and Cecelia might or might not have been charged and with what?

Vocabulary

detoxification, decipher, chronicles, flaunting, expelled, comeuppance, upstanding



Chapters 21 - 22

Summary

After learning of Lucas Slade's fate, Oletta begins talking to Jesus, and wears the hatpin as a reminder of the fact that her prayers had been heard. Cecelia is outside weeding the gardens when she hears the sound of bells tinkling. Thelma Rae says hello through the hedge, wearing black cigarette pants, a purple bikini top and a red, filmy scarf tied at her waist. She has cymbals called zills on her fingers that she found at an estate sale and mentions that she has something for Cecelia as well. She leads her into the house to a box filled with things she'd found and begins pulling out one item after another, showing Cecelia the items she'd found. Her friend Buck Preston bought her a compact dated 1884 that was shaped like a fan, telling her a little bit about him and their friendship. She rummages around a bit more before giving Cecelia a package wrapped in tissue paper. Opening it, Cecelia discovers The Eugene Field Book dated 1898 – a first edition of 'verses, stories and letters for school reading'. She tells Cecelia how her grandmother had introduced her to him and calling him wonderfully eccentric.

Thelma Rae continues to tell Cecelia stories about her grandmother, extolling her creativity and wisdom. She tells Cecelia that she would have loved her grandmother, and when Cecelia asks, admits that she hopes to have taken after her. Cecelia can't help but think about her mother and how she danced around the house in her red shoes, singing and blowing kisses to admirers that only she could see. Cecelia asks Thelma Rae what the difference between eccentric and crazy is, and she laughs, telling Cecelia that nobody knows.

One day Tallulah decides to drive to Tattnall County to visit Mr. Dooley's farm. When they get into the car, Cecelia asks if they can put the top down, remembering the day at Tybee Island, and after a moment's hesitation, Tallulah agrees. Tallulah is glad she suggested it, exclaiming how much it would have pleased Taylor. On the way, she tells Cecelia that she's been talking to her father and that the previous week he'd finally agreed to give Tallulah full custody of her. Cecelia wants to know if that makes them real family, but Tallulah assures her they already are and that her father wants the best for her, but Cecelia disagrees. They discuss her father, Tallulah insisting he loves her, and Cecelia convinced that he didn't care and never had. She can't help herself from telling Aunt Tootie that she hates him, and when Tallulah tries to correct her, Cecelia tells her that her father had a girlfriend in Detroit which is where he was instead of at home with her and her mother. Tallulah thinks she is repeating rumors she's heard, but Cecelia insists that he'd admitted it to her himself and that her mother had known about it. She relates a story from the winter before her mother died, when Cecelia had come home to discover her mother arguing with a pair of her father's pants, and smearing glue up and down on the zipper to the pants he'd asked her to press. She'd called him a conniving, cheating liar and Tallulah tells Cecelia how sorry she is. Then she tells her to go ahead and hate her father for a while, adding that she just might hate him a bit herself.



Tallulah wants Cecelia to talk to her, but agrees to wait until the following day when Cecelia asks. Then she admits that she'd spoken to her principal in Willoughby and that she was proud of Cecelia's good grades. She offers to send her to a private school called Rosemont School for Girls and asks her how she feels about it. Cecelia asks if she'd have to move away from her and Oletta, and Tallulah assures her that isn't the case. Relieved, Cecelia agrees to meet the headmistress. They get to the farm and are immediately surrounded by three very friendly dogs. A young boy offers her a peach from a basketful and then heads to the farmhouse to help his father sort the days' pick. Cecelia begins eating the peach and watching the woman hanging laundry on the line. A baby is sitting on a quilt in the shade, and laughs when her mother picks her up and twirls her in a circle. Cecelia shrinks in on herself, remembering her mother doing the same with her, and telling her that they would always have each other. Pain blooms deep inside her as she remembers another incident that occurred on the day her mother died. She'd come into Cecelia's bedroom asking her to come with her to get a gown for the evening's pageant and suggesting they get her a gown as well so they can enter the Mother-Daughter Beauty Pageant. Cecelia remembers wishing she was dead. Hurt, her mother goes without her telling Cecelia she'll be sorry if she doesn't go, but Cecelia just wishes she'd keep walking and never come back.

Then, in her mind, Cecelia witnesses the accident that took her mother's life. Cecelia reaches for the car as the vision of her mother disappears. She hears the trunk open and close, and in the distance Aunt Tootie's voice asking her what is wrong before everything goes black.

Analysis

In this segment, Oletta begins wearing the hat-pin they found on Tybee Island as symbolic of how prayers can be answered, and talks to Jesus as though He is by her side, exclaiming how she would never doubt Him again. She also reminds Cecelia to remember to show God her grateful heart. In keeping with that theme, Cecelia goes outside and weeds the perennial gardens.

Friendship and relationships continue to be ongoing themes in this segment as Thelma Rae reveals herself and gives Cecelia a gift from an estate sale she'd been to. They talk about her friend Buck Preston, who Thelma Rae assures Cecelia is not her boyfriend and Thelma Rae talks fondly about her grandmother – a woman she describes as creative and ahead of her time. One incident she describes involves a mahogany table that her grandmother painted white to the horror of her grandfather. For each dinner party following that, she would hand out pencils and ask her guests to contribute their names or something else. When the table was covered with signatures and sayings, she varnished it. Unfortunately, the varnish had cracked and the signatures faded, so the paint was sanded off again, taking with it names like Will Rogers, Ethel Merman and many others.

Cecelia recognizes the spirit Thelma Rae is describing and poses the question 'What is the difference between eccentric and crazy?' which is either simile or semantics that she



can't sort out in her head. According to Thelma Rae, no one else really could either. Cecelia's mother who danced through the house in red shoes, singing and blowing kisses didn't sound any crazier than Thelma Rae's grandmother dancing in the rain or the dolls that Eugene Field was collecting.

Continuity and stability are introduced into Cecelia's life as Tallulah discusses the upcoming school season. The permanence of the idea is grounding for Cecelia, and she considers the possibility of a new school for the first time.

The family theme is revealed again as Tallulah tells Cecelia that her father had agreed to sign custody of her over, wanting only what is best for her. Tallulah encourages Cecelia to talk to her, but Cecelia has yet to reveal any of herself to Tallulah like she had with Oletta. The anger that boils over when Tallulah suggests Carl wants the best for her is spontaneous and reveals how fresh the pain she feels is, but also foreshadows a possible repair as pain gives way to understanding. The family theme continues as Cecelia watches a woman interact with her child in the distance at a farm and recalls a similar event with her mother. The love her mother felt for her is so real to her at that moment that the loss of her hits her for the first time perhaps. She is unable to cope with the flood of emotion and shuts down physically as well.

Consequences continue to be a theme here as Tallulah learns the reasons for Cecelia's anger towards her father and the damage that he'd done to their family. The affair was common knowledge not only to Cecelia but to Camille as well Cecelia reveals. She remembers her mother referring to her father as a cheat and gluing his pant zipper shut.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cecelia have trouble understanding the difference between eccentric and crazy?

Discussion Question 2

What changes does Tallulah discuss with Cecelia and what do they mean for her?

Discussion Question 3

What factors contribute to Cecelia blacking out when she and Tallulah are at the farm getting peaches?

Vocabulary

inevitable, cultivating, chronically, audacity, curriculum, escapades



Chapters 23 - 24

Summary

Cecelia wakes and when Cecelia learns she's been in bed since the previous afternoon she panics thinking that this is the beginning. She is turning into her mother. She begs her aunt to tell her what happened. Tallulah asks her what she remembers, and she recalls the peach farm; the dogs; and then she stops. She tells Tallulah that she saw bad things, but still doesn't understand how she got home. Tallulah tells her that she walked up the stairs with a little help on her own, and she helped her get into bed. Tallulah asks her what she saw and Cecelia tells her that she'd seen her mother die. Tallulah is shocked and asks Cecelia if she was there when Camille died, but she tells her she was at home.

This was like she was there however. Every detail, beginning with her refusal to go to Goodwill with her mother and the mean things she said. Cecelia's eyes fill as she tells her aunt that it was her fault. Tallulah wraps her in her arms and holds her. Then she tells her that she'd talked to Mrs. Odell the night before, trying to see if there were any medical records available for her, but while there were no records she was able to give Tallulah a clearer picture of Cecelia's life.

Cecelia is devastated and can't believe that Mrs. Odell would do that do her. She wonders if her aunt is sorry she took her in and worried that one day she'd be the one on the sidewalk parading around in an old prom dress but instead Tallulah tells her a story about how her mind coped with the loss of Taylor. Cecelia admits that she's afraid of what she might become; that she might be just like her. Tallulah convinces her that there is no chance that she will lose her mind and talks to her about the different kinds of grief there are and how hard each one is. Cecelia doesn't want to talk anymore, but Tallulah tells her one more thing. She tells Cecelia that she's been brave for a very long time, but that it was alright to grieve. Despite what Tallulah tells her, Cecelia looks at herself in the mirror, seeking any signs of her eyes changing like her mother's did, and promising herself that at the first sign of psychosis, she'd toss herself over the side of a bridge.

Cecelia finds it hard to admit, but a part of her misses her mother. She remembers times when her mother told her bedtime stories and sat with her while she colored and can hear her mother asking her to promise she'll never leave her. She can smell her perfume and her kiss on her cheek. The tears come.

Oletta comes in some time later and tells Cecelia that life will pass her by if she doesn't become part of it again, and asks her to come and read Nancy Drew to her like she promised she would. She also told Cecelia that there was no sun without her face in the kitchen. Dr. O'Connor came to check on Cecelia every day, but soon realizes his presence isn't necessary. Weak, but missing her room upstairs, she begins by going down to the kitchen and opening her book to the first chapter. She begins to read aloud.



Slowly, Cecelia regains her strength, fueled by Oletta's ministrations of her favorite foods. She stopped being afraid that her mother's illness stalked her around every corner, and though still nervous about her new school, she remembers Oletta's advice that it was time to reclaim her power. Monday morning, Cecelia visits Rosemont School for Girls with Aunt Tootie. The headmistress, Ms. Fontaine, takes them on a tour of the school and Cecelia is stunned by the size and grandeur of the library that was only recently completed. Then she leaves Cecelia and Tallulah in the library to talk. Cecelia asks her what she should say if asked about her parents, and Tallulah tells her to keep it simple. After that, they go back to the office where Cecelia accepts a position in the school.

Cecelia is measured for her new uniform and forms are signed. Just as they get ready to leave, a girl Cecelia's height arrives with her father. Cecelia is introduced to Dixie Lee and before they both go home, they have arranged to meet and walk to school together. Dixie admits that before meeting Cecelia, she'd been a bit fearful of going to a new school. Just as their car pulls out onto the street, Dixie calls out her promise to be waiting for CeeCee and Cecelia didn't doubt it at all.

Analysis

Fear is the first theme as memories and how they affect the mind is examined in this segment. Cecelia comes to in one of the bedrooms at home, unsure how she got there or what happened. When she discovers how long she's been lying in bed, she panics remembering the episodes that her mother went through, and terrified that this incident marks the beginning of her decline into madness. Tallulah prods her to reveal what occurred to precipitate her collapse, and finally Cecelia discusses the day that her mother died. Tallulah finally understands the guilt Cecelia feels surrounding her mother's death and assures Cecelia that by refusing to go to Goodwill with her mother that day, she was not directly responsible for her mother's death, despite the fact that her mother had told her repeatedly that she would be sorry.

Grief is a theme that continues to be ongoing as Cecelia tries to deal with her mother's death. Despite her attempts to bury her former life and forget it, memories continue to surge to the forefront and interfere with the new life she is building. Tallulah shares a story of her own grief with Cecelia, telling her about how she'd thought she was fine after Taylor's death. In truth, she'd simply set it aside until it surged into her consciousness on its own. She tells Cecelia that she had to delve into her grief to move past it, and until she did, it would continue to reveal itself in other ways, such as it had with Cecelia at the farm.

Genetics and how they can affect subsequent generations is also briefly touched on as Cecelia finally reveals her deepest fear – that she will become her mother, and faces a future of decline into madness. Tallulah has no medical information to back up her assertions, but she assures Cecelia that there is no way that she will lose her mind.



Secrets and the damage they can cause are also revealed as Cecelia learns that Tallulah has discussed her with Mrs. Odell and learned a great deal more about what her life was like with her mother. Cecelia is devastated that her friend would do such a thing, and terrified that now that her secret was out, Tallulah wouldn't want her to stay anymore. Tallulah assures her that isn't the case, and convinces her that Mrs. Odell only shared her history so that she could better understand her. Cecelia is afraid that her mother's madness will follow her wherever she goes, but again Tallulah helps her to understand the truth by telling her a story of her own.

Memories of the past continue to surge into Cecelia's consciousness, and the memories are so strong that she can smell her mother's Shalimar perfume and feel the soft kiss on her cheek.

Life is the theme that Oletta reminds Cecelia is the driving force we are all part of. She tell Cecelia that despite the depths of her grief and sadness, life outside is continuing, and will continue despite all that is happening to her. It won't wait for her, and she has to make the decision to join it again. This advice is part of what gets Cecelia back on her feet.

Love is a strong theme in this segment as well. Cecelia reveals the love she felt and feels for her mother, despite the difficulties that occurred as she descended into madness; Tallulah and Oletta reveal their love for Cecelia as they take turns spending time with her, sharing and listening. Oletta doesn't actually say that she loves Cecelia, but telling her that there is no sun in the kitchen without her face is enough to make Cecelia smile, and to fill some of the empty ache in her with the love Oletta offers so freely.

Iris Fontaine is introduced as the headmistress of Rosemont School for Girls. She is a kind and welcoming force with white hair and rosy cheeks that does her best to put Cecelia at ease. She shows Cecelia around the school and welcomes her.

Acclimation is an ongoing theme for Cecelia's life, but it surges to the forefront when Cecelia and Tallulah go to Rosemont School for Girls to determine whether or not she would attend in the fall. Cecelia takes great care with her appearance and worries that as a Northerner, she won't fit in or be accepted by the rest of the students.

Dixie Lee McAllister is also introduced as a brand new student to Rosemont School for Girls. She is outgoing and friendly and immediately bonds with Cecelia, happy to know someone in her new school. A gregarious girl, Dixie Lee's introduction foreshadows a smooth transition for Cecelia to her new school. The fact that Dixie Lee also loves English implies that the headmistress booked these appointments close enough together that they would facilitate a meeting between the two girls.

Friendship is an important theme again as Dixie Lee and Cecelia bond immediately, sharing their first day jitters and a love for English. The rest comes as naturally as breathing, and Cecelia goes from afraid and nervous that she won't fit in to looking forward to her first day in a new school.



Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Oletta contribute to Cecelia's recovery?

Discussion Question 2

What advice does Tallulah give Cecelia when Cecelia admits the fears she has about attending a new school and why is it exceptionally good advice?

Discussion Question 3

What things appeal to Cecelia about her new school, and what happens to alleviate her fears of attending a new school for the first time?

Vocabulary

tendency, recollection, envisioned, perimeter, prosperity, gregarious



Chapters 25 - 26

Summary

Cecelia gets a package three days before school starts and opens the box to reveal a pink, silky pouch, knowing immediately what is inside. Her mother's pearls are smooth and cool to the touch, and she sits there in a stupor until the box slides to the floor from her lap and a note falls out. Her father wrote simply that he thought she should have them. She fingers a pearl, remembering how her mother had once told her the story of how they were created. She said that each had a flaw of some kind because in nature nothing was truly perfect but she doesn't believe that because Cecelia was her perfect pearl.

Later, Cecelia and Tallulah go out to buy a rake and a bulb planter and then Tallulah takes Cecelia to the house they'd saved from a wrecking ball. Cecelia can hardly believe the changes. The workmen had even uncovered a mural on one wall that is so realistic that it seems as though you could walk right into the garden. Watching the joy with which Tallulah shows her around Cecelia can see the fire in her eyes and can feel the life of the house in the soles of her feet as they walk through.

Cecelia gets a letter from Mrs. Odell saying that she had sold her house and she was taking the bus to Kissimmee, Florida. On the way she plans to come and stay for a two week visit. Cecelia is thrilled and dances around the kitchen. A room is made up and after a light breakfast Cecelia and Tallulah leave for the bus terminal. The bus pulls in and just when Cecelia is beginning to think she didn't come, the driver helps Mrs. Odell get off the bus. Cecelia is in her arms in a beat, and a tear runs down Mrs. Odell's cheek. The first few days of her visit are a whirlwind of morning sightseeing, and lunches on the porch. Three of Tallulah's friends stop by to say hello to Mrs. Odell, each bringing a small gift and welcoming her to Savannah. Cecelia realizes that this was Southern hospitality - heartfelt and practiced as a social art it was passed down from generation to generation. Southerners know how to make a person feel welcome.

One day Cecelia takes a broom to the spider webs on the porch when Thelma Rae sees her and tells her how spiders are wonderful and misunderstood. She tells Cecelia about Matilda, a yellow garden spider that has spun a web in her jasmine trellis. The previous week she'd spun a new web going from the trellis to her statue and in the sun it looks just like strands of silver. They talk about Nirvana and Thelma Rae explains the difference between the Nirvana she is talking about and the place in Idaho called Nirvana where Serenity Gardens was located. Before Cecelia goes back in, Thelma Rae brings over a silver bookmark for Mrs. Odell who loves it. The next to come over is Violene Hobbs, coming in without so much as knocking. Cecelia is reminded of how her mother had wailed that northerners were without hospitality or etiquette. She sees the grain of truth in that now.



Part way through the visit, Tallulah takes Cecelia outside and mentions that Oletta hasn't been herself lately, and explains that since Cecelia has spent every moment with Mrs. Odell, Oletta is probably feeling left out. Cecelia insists she loves Oletta, and realizes that she hasn't even read to her since Mrs. Odell came. Cecelia tries to correct her mistake, but Oletta is hurt and acts as though she doesn't care. She reads her a story about Martin Luther King from the paper and Oletta hands her the cookies she'd baked that morning just for her, telling Oletta she is the best cook and best friend she's ever had. When Oletta gets on the bus to go home, Cecelia blurts out that she loves her and smiling, Oletta returns the sentiment.

Analysis

Family continues to be an ongoing theme throughout as Cecelia receives a package from her father containing her mother's pearls which he adds in the enclosed note he believed she was given by her mother when she finished school. Mrs. Odell comes to visit, and Cecelia enjoys the fact that the person she admires most from her old life meets the people she has come to love in her new life, but during the visit Cecelia is reminded that she has been neglecting Oletta. She repairs the situation as soon as she is made aware of it by Tallulah, and walking Oletta to the bus stop after, she finally tells Oletta that she loves her. Oletta tells her she loves her too – a sentiment Cecelia has longed to hear.

The past tugs at Cecelia when she receives a parcel containing her mother's pearls from her father and she remembers the story her mother told her of how pearls are made. Similarly, the past comes to life for Tallulah as she takes Cecelia through the house she was instrumental in saving from the wrecking ball. The value of restoration is briefly examined as Tallulah shows Cecelia the treasures that have been uncovered. The author uses a metaphor of life as Cecelia feels the humming of the old house through the soles of her shoes.

Similes such as the growl of the lawnmower; heartfelt greetings that drip like honey; and Camille who withered like a camellia bush when taken above the Mason-Dixon Line are used in this segment.

Love is an overall theme in this segment beginning with Cecelia's father who sends her the gift of her mother's pearls, timed to arrive before she began her new school and continuing with Mrs. Odell coming to visit Cecelia in Savannah – something she describes as making her so happy she thought she'd burst. The theme of love continues when Cecelia realizes that with Mrs. Odell visiting, she'd been neglectful of Oletta whose feelings are hurt. Cecelia fixes her relationship with Oletta, walking her to the bus stop after the day is done and telling her that she loves her. Oletta returns the sentiment, a simple phrase that Cecelia had longed to hear.

Etiquette and hospitality are themes as Cecelia realizes that her mother was right. People from the South have a way of making people feel welcome with hospitality that is seldom seen anywhere else. Cecelia notices it when Mrs. Odell is welcomed and Mrs.



Odell is enjoying every moment of it. People in the south have a way of making you feel like you are special and go out of their way to do things even for people they don't know.

Life and the value of all life are themes that are touched upon as Thelma Rae notices Cecelia sweeping away cobwebs from the porch. She tells Cecelia about Matilda the garden spider that had taken up residence in her trellis, extolling the talents she has as a web builder. Thelma Rae claims that Matilda has musical aptitude and speculates that she might be reincarnated as a fine musician referring to her as a true artist. That leads to conversations where Thelma Rae gives a brief description of nirvana and the path that must be taken to reach it.

Restorations of things cast aside are a popular pursuit of both Thelma Rae and Tallulah. Tallulah is particularly concerned with heritage homes while Thelma Rae enjoys finding treasures of all kinds and sharing them with the people around her. In their way, each woman is bringing life back to something that was slated for garbage, perhaps an insight into the author and her feelings about waste in general.

Relationships prove challenging for Cecelia again in this segment. When Mrs. Odell comes to Savannah to visit, Cecelia is so consumed with spending time with the woman she'd known all her life that she doesn't realize that Oletta is missing her company and feeling left out. Cecelia manages to repair the hurt feelings and even finds the courage to tell her that she loves her as Oletta is getting on the bus to go home. She returns the sentiment, filling a void in Cecelia.

Discussion Question 1

What treasures are discovered in the house Tallulah helped save and how is her passion similar to that of Thelma Rae's?

Discussion Question 2

What and where is nirvana according to Thelma Rae and how does that differ from Cecelia's version?

Discussion Question 3

What does Cecelia finally understand about a comment her mother made on several occasions and what examples does Cecelia see that enlighten her?

Vocabulary

contraption, dilapidated, illusion, acceptance, temperaments, geographically, furrowed



Chapters 27 - 28

Summary

Mrs. Odell helps Oletta peel peaches for a little while, and then asks to use the phone to call her cousin Adele. When Cecelia sees her soon after, she is pale and tells Cecelia that she has nowhere to go and nothing of her own. Cecelia runs to get Tallulah and Oletta, and she tells them that when she called, Adele's son Roy answered and told her that Adele had died of a stroke. He'd tried to reach her before she left but had been unsuccessful. The funeral had already been done, but Roy tells her she can stay in Adele's house if she wants to, but she doesn't know anyone there and has no reason to continue there. Instead, she tells them all, she will return to Ohio and perhaps rent somewhere. Tallulah hardly thinks about it before offering Mrs. Odell accommodations for as long as she needs. Gertrude refuses at first, insisting that she couldn't accept charity, so Tallulah told her in return she could oversee the gardens. The issue solved, Oletta herds them back into the kitchen to finish the peaches.

After dinner, they hear Thelma Rae exclaim loudly, calling something an evil little bitch and when Cecelia runs over to see what's going on, she discovers Matilda's web has captured a small hummingbird. Tallulah and Mrs. Odell arrive shortly afterward and Mrs. Odell goes straight to the rescue, taking the small bird in her palm, pulling it free of the strands of Matilda's web. Cecelia takes tweezers and gently pulls away the remaining webbing, but if the spider hadn't injected it with venom, it had a chance. Moments later, the hummingbird tries to stand. It takes a minute, but then it lifts off and disappears. Thelma Rae gives Mrs. Odell a hug, assuring her that there was a special place in heaven for her. Then she decides to remove the rest of the webbing. Cecelia stays to help while Thelma Rae laments her ignorance. Cecelia sees Matilda for the first time and is surprised by how beautiful she is, but Thelma Rae no longer sees her beauty and Cecelia is shocked when she knocks her out of her web and slaps her with the broom until there is little left. Cecelia can't help but comment that it was unlikely Thelma Rae would reach nirvana any time soon.

Tallulah goes shopping and returns with colorful linens announcing she has a surprise. That Sunday, she plans to host a garden party and tells Cecelia it will give her a chance to wear her new party dress. Cecelia is horrified. Cecelia goes upstairs and takes the dress out, forcing a smile to her face when Tallulah appears and tells her to try it on. Tallulah has tears in her eyes when she sees her in it, and Cecelia won't ruin it for her. She forces a smile on her face and puts on the socks and shoes to match. Tallulah suggests she invite Dixie Lee, but Cecelia tells her she is not in town. Cecelia thanks her for everything and takes it all off again. On the day of the party, men show up early to begin setting up. The amount of preparation leaves Mrs. Odell and Cecelia speechless. Oletta leaves for a while and when she returns she is dressed in ruffles and peep-toes. Cecelia hardly recognizes her. Oletta helps Cecelia get dressed and Tallulah even loans Mrs. Odell a dress for the occasion. Cecelia dons the dress, and finally admits the truth of how she feels to Oletta who immediately sets her straight, telling her



not to waste her future by hanging onto things from the past. Then Oletta and Cecelia go downstairs.

Analysis

Family is a strong theme immediately as Cecelia sits in the kitchen listening to the women she loves talking about peaches, feeling a peace deep down that she has never known. A family format is something she doesn't remember, but for bits and pieces of her childhood that come back to her now and then. This theme continues as Tallulah plans a garden party as a way of introducing Cecelia as a member of her family. Even Oletta is attending as a guest and as a member of Cecelia's family for this occasion. Oletta takes the time to go home and dress in her finery, wearing a hat she created herself for the occasion.

Death is a theme that rises briefly when Mrs. Odell discovers that her cousin Adele had a stroke and died. As such, Mrs. Odell finds herself homeless. The death of her cousin is particularly frightening to Mrs. Odell who had convinced herself to move to Florida so that she wouldn't be alone in the last year of her life.

Generosity is also ongoing and unending in this story as once again Tallulah offers her home up to Mrs. Odell. Mrs. Odell enjoys Savannah but isn't ready to accept charity so Tallulah offers a compromise that seems to sort things out. She asks the Mrs. Odell oversee the care of the gardens in return for lodging. Mrs. Odell comments that her knees won't take the stairs for too long, but Tallulah insists they'll cross that bridge when they come to it which foreshadows an eventual change in her future. Tallulah also loans Mrs. Odell a dress for the party.

Nature's balance is also examined as Thelma Rae discovers that not all creatures live life in harmony with everything else. Despite previous discussions about nirvana with Cecelia, when the spider she names Matilda captures a hummingbird in her web, Thelma Rae is devastated. Mrs. Odell manages to free the bird and remove the webbing, and since the spider had not stung the bird, it eventually flies away. Thelma Rae uses the broom to whack the life out of Matilda, calling her evil and Cecelia can't help but mention that she'll never find nirvana that way, and she agrees.

Cecelia's past haunts her once again as Tallulah decides to throw a garden party and Cecelia finally has a reason to wear the white party dress that reminds her so much of the one her mother wore. The similarities are enough to horrify her when she looks in the mirror, and it takes all of her self-control to mask those feelings for her aunt's sake. Anxiety wins however as she gets dressed and she finally admits the truth to Oletta.

Discussion Question 1

What happens to upset Mrs. Odell, and how is the problem resolved?



Discussion Question 2

What does Matilda do that upsets Thelma Rae so much and what does she do to ensure it will never happen again?

Discussion Question 3

What advice does Oletta give Cecelia when Cecelia admits that she isn't comfortable wearing the party dress that Tallulah gave her?

Vocabulary

imposing, composure, pulverized, crinoline, honorary, ragamuffin



Chapters 29 - 30

Summary

Oletta takes Cecelia by the hand and whispers "smile" as Aunt Tootie introduces her. Then she takes Cecelia into the crowd where she is passed from one person to another; kissed and pinched and fawned over until Cecelia feels like a ballerina in a music box. Cecelia can hardly believe the extravagant spread and pastel colors. Everyone drank Long Island iced tea and when she manages to escape for a moment, she washes her face and grabs her camera. Cecelia grabs a plate of treats and sits on a bench just as Oletta jumps up and flags down a taxi. Cecelia is delighted to see not only Chessie and Nadine, but Sapphire, Mrs. Obee and Flossy as well. She hugs them all. Mrs. Obee presents Tallulah with a pale pink orchid in a pot, and gives Mrs. Odell a pot of yellow orchids. Cecelia gathers them all together and takes one of her finest photos ever. Cecelia can hardly imagine what she'd done to deserve all of the kindness her great aunt had shown her and continues to show her every day.

Mrs. Hobbs arrives and in true form asks the woman next to her what all the 'nigras' are doing there and speculates as to Tallulah's state of mind. Cecelia is so angry she contemplates violence. When Violene sits herself beside Thelma Rae, Thelma Rae turns her back and talking to Mrs. Odell she mentions that the magnolia blossoms are heavenly and she used to have a lovely tree in her garden but while she was out of town her 'evil neighbor' murdered it. She goes on to describe the incident in detail and then adds that her neighbor likes to strip for one member of the police department as well. Then she turns to Violene and asks her when Earl is due for his next spanking. Violene snaps. She accuses her of sending disgusting pictures and Thelma Rae rolls her eyes insisting she has no idea what she's talking about, but that Earl sure likes it when she spansks him in her chicken outfit. Violene smears pate on Thelma Rae's cheek and the fight is on. They hurl insults back and forth and wrestle with each other until Tallulah breaks it up, but not before a cake plate that belonged to her mother-in-law is broken. They continue to trade insults, but Thelma Rae is laughing already and promising to make it up to Tallulah. Ever gracious, Tallulah sends them home as the rest of the women clap and laugh, telling Tallulah that she always has the best parties.

Cecelia looks around, feeling a sense of warmth and belonging she's never known before and realizes that Savannah is her new home. She knows she is safe and that this is some place that she belongs. It occurs to her that her father was right when he'd told her she'd thank him one day. Later, Cecelia takes the photos from the party and tucks them around the frame of her mirror, weaving the ribbon from her hair around them. She adds the photo of her mother as Vidalia's Onion Queen and stands back looking at the women in her life. She talks to her mother quietly in the night, and tells her that she understands her love of the South now. She sifts through memories of her mother and realizes that regardless of all that had happened, her mother loved her. She takes out her mother's pearls and remembers the story of their beginning.



The next morning Cecelia gets ready for school, hardly able to believe her reflection. She sits at the table, wondering if Dixie Lee will be waiting for her like she promised. Like a family, Oletta, Tallulah, Mrs. Odell and Cecelia have breakfast together and then say goodbye to Cecelia. She steps out, and turns to the sidewalk crestfallen to note that Dixie isn't there. She looks up and down the sidewalk, knowing she can't wait much longer. Finally, doing her best to look happy, she opens the gate and on the low stone wall Dixie is reading. She gets up, and they both exclaim how happy they are to see each other and how worried they were that they missed each other. They head towards school, Dixie talking about the book she is reading, and Cecelia glances back to see all three women in the living room window. Her heart almost bursts, it is so full and in that moment, Cecelia believes her mother is out there watching over her too.

Analysis

Socialization is an immediate theme in this last segment as Cecelia comes to grips with some distinct changes in her life. The biggest is realizing that she might be popular – something that had never occurred to her before. She also learns to leave the past behind as she mingles with the women invited to the garden party and discovers that she fits in, despite her fears. In fact, she is passed from one woman to another; called sugar and darlin' and peach and precious more often than she ever would have imagined possible and discovers that she does indeed belong. She is overjoyed to watch as Chessie and Nadine arrive with the women from Green Hills Home arrive as well, Oletta having told Tallulah what a hit Cecelia had been during their visit.

Grateful is a word that easily describes Cecelia best in this moment as she considers the things that have happened to her. Not only did her aunt tell her how proud she was of her, but she also tells her that she is becoming popular – something Cecelia had no idea could happen. Cecelia considers all that her Aunt Tootie has done for her, and is overwhelmed with gratitude for the woman who gave her a life that she is coming to love, and who cared enough about her to take her in and include her as family.

Bigotry is a brief theme here as well when Violene arrives and exclaims loudly about the number of 'nigras' Tootie had invited, insisting she must have lost her mind. It reminds Cecelia of her earlier comments about Oletta being 'Miz Tootie's nigger' and for a moment, she is ready to cause Violene bodily harm.

Violene sits herself next to Thelma Rae who turns her back, foreshadowing immediate problems. It doesn't take long for Thelma Rae to begin speaking her mind regarding the murder of her magnolia tree and Violene doesn't hesitate to join in when Thelma Rae brings Earl into the conversation.

Conflict is an obvious theme as Thelma Rae and Violene demonstrate how a small issue between neighbors can become much more when left without resolution. Anger and resentment can escalate a simple conversation until it becomes a physical and verbal assault, as is the case between Thelma Rae and Violene.



Graciousness continues to be an overall theme where Tallulah is concerned. She begins by opening her home to Cecelia, and then to Mrs. Odell. She invites her friends to come and meet her new family and despite a confrontation between Violene and Thelma Rae, she maintains her composure simply sending them home even though they broke a cake platter that was an heirloom. Thelma Rae also reveals her gracious nature when, despite their fight, she offers Violene a hand up to her feet. Less than gracious, as usual, Violene rejects it.

Fate was sealed for Cecelia when her mother died and her father insisted she live with Tallulah, but although she hated him for it at the time; he'd promised her that one day she would thank him. Standing there in the midst of the garden party, Cecelia realizes he was right. She finally feels at home, safe and feels as though she belongs, and always will. It is with wonder that she realizes how right he was.

Photographs reveal Cecelia's new life and the women in it. She displays them around her mirror along with a photo of her mother and the photo of Lucille and Rosa at the street picnic. It strikes her then that each of these women had touched her in an indelible fashion, now pressed in the pages of her Life Book.

Friendship is a big theme throughout this story as Cecelia makes new friends in Savannah, but never as strongly as on Cecelia's first day of school. Dixie is waiting for her outside, and reveals she was just as afraid of going to school alone as Cecelia was. Dixie talks a mile a minute as Cecelia looks back to see the other women watching from the living room and knowing that life is wonderful.

Discussion Question 1

What visitors to the party surprise Cecelia and why?

Discussion Question 2

Who is responsible for breaking Taylor's mother's cake plate and why does it happen?

Discussion Question 3

What does Cecelia realize about both of her parents and how does she feel about them as a result?

Vocabulary

catastrophe, effervescent, spectacle, stupefied, indelible, turbulent



Characters

Cecelia (CeeCee) Rose Honeycutt

Cecelia looks a lot like her mother, both of them having long brown hair and blue eyes and the same heart shaped face and smile. Cecelia has a difficult youth, left to care for her mother who is falling deeper and deeper into psychosis.

By the age of seven, Cecelia is already dealing with her mother's manic behavior, doing all that she can to keep her calm and at home. Cecelia has no friends, and that situation only gets worse as she gets older and her mother's psychosis increases. She is unable to bring anyone home, and is the brunt of so much teasing concerning her mother that she spends most of her time hiding in the library from everyone.

The only saving grace in Cecelia's childhood is their next door neighbor Mrs. Odell with whom she spends every Sunday. Her time there is the only normalcy her life knows. When Cecelia's mother dies, Cecelia has been caring for her for years and has little patience for the antics that accompany her psychosis. As such, she is short and abrupt with her mother before she leaves the house that day, and is consumed with guilt for it afterwards.

Cecelia goes to live with her great aunt Tallulah Caldwell at the age of twelve. It takes a full summer of love and patience before Cecelia finally grieves for her mother, and is able to let go of her past. Tallulah and Oletta are the grounding forces that give Cecelia a foundation with which to stand, and to deal with the past. After some time, she finally establishes trust and is honest about her fears which Tallulah and Oletta put to rest.

Camille Sugarbaker Honeycutt

Camille is Cecelia's mother. A troubled woman, Camille suffers from a psychological disorder that causes her to have emotional swings from one end of the scale to the other. She goes from extreme highs to extreme lows, with little time spent in the middle or level. Like her daughter, Camille has a heart shaped face and has blue eyes and brown hair.

Camille lives largely in the past, stuck in a time when she was the 1951 Vidalia Onion Queen and felt like she belonged. She met her husband when she was young, and fell for him despite the fact that he was older than she was. Carl takes her to Ohio after they are married and like the flowering bush that is her namesake, Camille withers in the northern climate. She, like the camellia, cannot thrive north of the Mason-Dixon Line. She complains constantly that there is no etiquette or hospitality in the North and people are classless and cold.

Camille spends most of her time either in extreme highs or extreme lows. The lows are spent in solitude, quiet and morose while the highs are punctuated with trips to the



Goodwill where she buys ragged prom dresses and accessories. Then she parades around town in them, soliciting votes to be the one who represents Georgia.

Camille dies when she steps out in front of an ice cream truck, dressed in her party fare.

Mrs. Gertrude Odell

Mrs. Odell is an elderly woman who lives next door to the Honeycutt family, and often spends time with Cecelia. She had a husband named Elmer and a son named James. Her son was killed in the war, and she lost Elmer unexpectedly. Getting to know Cecelia is an unexpected gift. Cecelia goes to her place every Sunday morning where Mrs. Odell makes them Sunday breakfast. In return, Cecelia helps pull weeds in her garden and helps with odd tasks when necessary. Mrs. Odell was married at one time, but her husband passed away. She has thin white hair that she wears in tight little pin curls and is always smiling. Mrs. Odell loves choir singing, tuning in each Sunday on the radio to listen. Cecelia wants to live with Mrs. Odell after her mother is killed, but her father reminds her that Mrs. Odell is over eighty years old and could not take Cecelia in full time.

Gertrude comes to Georgia to visit Cecelia in Savannah while on the way to live out her days in Florida with her cousin Adele. Unfortunately, Adele passes away suddenly, leaving Mrs. Odell homeless. Tallulah barely hesitates before telling her that she has a home with them.

Tallulah Caldwell

Tallulah is Cecelia's grandmother's sister on her mother's side, and she lives the kind of life that Camille would have envied. Tallulah was married to Taylor who died not long ago, leaving Tallulah alone. Tallulah was born in Brunswick, Georgia where her father owned and operated a small jewelry store. Her sister, Lucille, had taken the store over when their father died. Tallulah and her sister Lucille had come to visit when Cecelia was a baby, but Cecelia's grandmother had a falling out with both sisters and had stopped talking to them. Tallulah has silver-gray hair and her face is etched with lines that give her a gentle look to match her kind blue eyes.

Tallulah is always impeccably dressed, with shoes and hat matching her suit and driving what Cecelia believes is the most beautiful car she has ever seen. Tallulah drives a 1948 Packard Victoria, and had owned it since then – a gift from Taylor. The car has a hood ornament of an angel named Delilah, another gift Taylor had made for her to take care of her when she drives.

Tallulah takes Cecelia in and is generous with both her love and her time. As such, Cecelia heals and by the time the summer is over, Cecelia is ready to attend the private school Tallulah introduces her to.



Oletta Jones

Oletta is the woman who runs Tallulah's house, and is her cook. She is a tall woman with chestnut colored skin and a thick build. She has brown eyes and wears a scarf coiled over her head. Oletta was once married to a man named Henry and they were together for six years before liquor took his life. She still wears a narrow silver band but does so to commemorate her mother's death.

Oletta has been with Tallulah for so long that Tallulah considers her to be family – twenty nine years now, and admits that Tallulah and her husband Taylor treat her very well. Though her legs bother her, and she often thinks about retirement, she also knows that it makes no sense to sit around and wait for the end to come. Oletta is fifty-five years old and she was born in the month of May. On her birthday, Tallulah told her to take a week off with pay, and had a new recliner and a color television delivered to her home. Oletta's home is yellow with trim that is violet in color. The front steps are edged with clay pots that are filled with flowers and a rocking chair sits on the porch. Wind chimes made from silver spoons hang on the porch and a gravel driveway leads to a small garage, although Oletta doesn't drive.

Violene Hobbs

Violene is a large chested woman whose body is a mass of extra rolls stuffed into a dress with a neckline so low that it is a wonder everything stays where it should. She has blond hair that is teased into a mound on the top of her head, and is one of the nosiest women in Savannah. She has eyes that remind Cecelia of a Chihuahua and can't help but involve herself in everyone else's business, so much so that during her first two minutes with Cecelia, she blurts out the question as to how her mother managed to get hit by a truck.

Violene lives two doors down from Tallulah, and brags that her house is one of the very few in Savannah. She tells Cecelia she can come over anytime, and they'll talk about her mother. Violene has two grown daughters, but they haven't visited her in years. Her husband had owned a bank in Savannah, but one morning he'd simply had enough of her and instead of shooting her, he shot himself dead.

Violene is a self-involved and self-centered woman who chose to cut down a beautiful magnolia tree that bordered her property with Thelma Rae, cutting it down simply to avoid it from shedding an occasional blossom into her pool.

Violene trips on a slug when she and Earl Jenkins are fooling around, giving herself stitches and a concussion, but fortunately this occurs while someone is there to call the authorities and get her medical attention.



Thelma Rae Goodpepper

Thelma lives next door to Tallulah. When Cecelia first meets her, she is amazed by her grace and exotic allure. Thelma has cool blue eyes, skin that is as white as porcelain and is wearing a silk caftan the color of midnight with silver glitter. She has wavy red hair that she wears pinned high on her head and the reddest lips she's ever seen. She has silver lame slippers on and is wearing a ring that is deep green and is the size of a walnut.

In February, Thelma Rae turned forty-five and is unhappy with the changes that are occurring in her body, calling the passage of time an insult and a terrible slap in the face.

Thelma Rae has an ongoing feud with her neighbor Violene Hobbs who took it upon herself to cut down a beautiful magnolia tree growing on the border of their properties. She did so without notice or consultation, killing the tree rather than attempting to prune it or cut it back. Thelma Rae gets even by regularly collecting the slugs attacking her garden and flinging them across the hedge into Violene's yard. When Violene slips on one, Cecelia keeps Thelma Rae's secret as to the origin of the slugs, earning her respect. Cecelia knows that she doesn't want to fall out of Thelma Rae's favor.

Nadine

Nadine is a friend of Oletta's. She makes custom jewelry using beads and also works part time at the hospital as a nurse. Nadine is a short woman and wears her hair gathered into a knot on the top of her head. She has a voice that belongs to someone much larger than she is. Nadine recently purchased a brand new Oldsmobile but the dealer had to tow it away when the vehicle wouldn't start. Chessie is Nadine's sister.

Chessie

Chessie is a friend of Oletta's who does Stone Readings using stones that have ancient designs carved into them and that she claims have a power all their own, able to divine the future. She charges five dollars for a single reading. Chessie has broad shoulders like a man and a body shaped like a barrel. Her skin is as dark as midnight. She wears her hair cut close to her scalp and baggy overalls. Nadine is Chessie's sister.

Lucas Slade

Lucas is a thirty-four year old man who attacked Nadine, stealing her watch and necklace while they were at Tybee Island one afternoon. Nadine is saved from him by Chessie who swings her bag of stones hard into the side of his face. He suffers a fractured cheekbone and broken nose, and embarrassed that he'd been bested by a group of black folks, he lies to the police, claiming he'd been attacked by a large black



man and his friends. A member of the KKK, Lucas has a history of hatred for black people.

Sapphire June Wilson

Sapphire is Oletta's aunt and lives in Green Hills Home. Sapphire is ninety one years old and can't believe that Oletta brought a young and very white girl to visit.

Olive Pearson

Mrs. Pearson lives in Green Hills Home and is losing her mind. She is a small and bow-legged woman who assures Oletta and Cecelia that she and Louis Armstrong are about to sing a duet. While Louis Armstrong's presence is all in her mind, the staff allows her to believe he is there to facilitate her taking a bath.

Mrs. Obee

Mrs. Obee lives in Green Hills Home and is unable to talk. She has the innocence of a child and a habit of stealing marbles from the Chinese checkers board. Mrs. Obee has a secret. In an abandoned car in the back of the property just past a patch of sunflowers, Mrs. Obee grows the most wonderful orchids that Cecelia has ever seen, each more beautiful than the next. At least twenty pots live there, the humidity controlled by raising or lowering the window. Mrs. Obee had her voice box removed when cancer was found there, but she manages to make herself understood when necessary.

Faustina (Flossy) Woodlow

Flossy lives in Green Hills Home as well. She wears a tattered slip and a shower cap for reasons that Cecelia can't understand.

Earl Jenkins

Earl is a policeman in Savannah. Despite the fact that he is married, he is having an affair with Violenne Hobbs. Thelma Rae and Cecelia witness him step out onto her back porch one evening wearing baggy white underwear and a Zorro mask, twirling one of Violenne's brassieres like a lasso. Telling her to 'shake it for Big Daddy', he asks her to do a striptease for him again, and tosses her brassiere into the shrubbery.

Estelle Trent

Estelle is a friend of Tallulah's and is the one who calls to tell her that Frankie Mae had suffered a stroke.



Lucille

Lucille is Tallulah's sister. She was married to an Irishman named Dutch who swept her off her feet, marrying her just three months after they first met. Only two years later he left her, cleaning out her savings account; stealing their mother's antique diamond watch; and driving off in Lucille's brand new Chevrolet coupe. The experience changes her and she swears off men from that day forward. She also never bought another car after that, spending her days in the store and her nights in the apartment above it. Lucille has a cat named Napoleon, and likes to knit while listening to Perry Como. She wears and smells like lily of the valley cologne and has twinkling blue eyes.

Rosa Cicero

Rosa is Lucille's best friend. She oozes a femininity that makes men walk into walls and her smile is magical. She works for as the bookkeeper for Wilma Jo's Beauty World half a block from the jewelry store and claims it is the place to go for dye jobs or bouffant style hairdos. Rosa was once married to a man named Frank who spent more of his time on the golf course than at a job of any kind. After nineteen years, Rosa had had enough of supporting him, and exploded. Her son and Frank both left, and she moved into a one-bedroom apartment, buying a purple velvet sofa the same day. Rosa and Lucille have been friends since they were nine years old.

Taylor Caldwell

Taylor was Tallulah's husband and is described as a kind and decent man by Oletta as well as being powerful – a combination difficult to manage by most. His life ended in his favorite chair, a heart attack claiming him. Before his death, Taylor amassed a small fortune. He bought a great deal of land in Florida, making a fortune when he sold it off. He also was involved in quarry mining.

Carl Honeycutt

Carl is a machine-tool salesman who spends most of his time travelling between Indiana and Michigan, coming home on weekends. A fifty seven year old man, Carl is considerably older than his wife Camille who is only thirty three.

Mrs. Dottie McGee

Dottie McGee runs the local Goodwill store. When Camille dies, Dottie is the only person other than Mrs. Odell, Cecelia and her father who attend the funeral. She drives an old green Volkswagen and waddles when she walks. Mrs. McGee can't help but comment that Camille was the best customer she ever had.



Symbols and Symbolism

Shoes

Cecelia's mother suffers from a psychological disorder that causes her to suffer mood swings from very high to very low with little middle ground. One of the ways that this disorder reveals itself is in the number of shoes she felt she had to have.

Bolshoi Ballet

The shoe salesman compares the amount of shoes Mrs. Honeycutt purchases to the entire collection owned by the Bolshoi Ballet.

Red-winged Blackbird

A red-winged blackbird is what Camille watches and tells Cecelia she wishes she could be. Camille sees herself as trapped in a life she doesn't belong in, and the blackbird is a symbol of the freedom she so desperately wants from the life she now has.

Snow Globe

When Cecelia finds her mother outside watching a red winged black bird, her mother tells her that she wishes she could be that bird and fly away, escaping to the life she should have had. Cecelia didn't understand the value of that kind of escapism until a little later on when her mother tosses talcum powder across the room and makes Cecelia feel as though she is standing in a snow globe. For that brief moment, she is able to escape her own horrors, seeing herself in a different reality – one that is softer, and beautiful, clean and untouched before reality returns again.

Vidalia Onion Queen

The Vidalia Onion Queen is the beauty pageant that Cecelia's mother won in 1951, and is the place where she believes she belongs and now feels like a debutante without a ball.

Nancy Drew

Nancy Drew is the main character of the series that Cecelia uses to escape the madness of her life as Nancy Drew is a detective who always seems to be able to make sense of things regardless of how complicated they got.



Packard Victoria

A 1948 Packard Victoria is the car that Tallulah drives. Her husband Taylor bought it for her, adding a silver angel hood ornament they call Delilah to keep her safe on the road. The car is red with a white convertible top and is the prettiest car that Cecelia has ever seen.

Delilah

Delilah is the silver angel that Taylor added to the Packard Victoria he bought for his wife Tallulah in 1948. Delilah is the guardian that will keep her safe on the road, he tells her.

Mule Kick

Mule kick is what many people in the South called liquor and is what finished Oletta's marriage with her husband Henry.

Psychosis

Psychosis is what Tallulah tells Carl Camille was suffering from. When Cecelia overhears this, she looks it up in the dictionary and learns that genetic inheritance can play a part in biological relationships.

Sleeping Porch

A sleeping porch is a porch surrounded by floor to ceiling screens to provide a barrier from the bugs when sleeping in the sleigh shaped iron bed. The floor is wood painted a robin's egg blue and the ceiling is a soft yellow shade. It has a view of the entire garden.

Beaten Biscuits

Beaten biscuits are a type of biscuits made by beating the dough with enthusiasm until they 'blister up real good', and are best served with honey and butter.

Ladies of Savannah Garden Club

Founded by Tallulah, the Ladies of Savannah Garden Club consists of Tallulah and seven of her close friends who assemble once a month to discuss gardening, gossip and enjoy each other's company. It is an important group, despite appearing frivolous on the surface because together the women have managed to stop the destruction of some of the heritage houses Tallulah loves so much.



Historic Savannah Foundation

The Historic Savannah Foundation was formed to help in the recognition and preservation of historic buildings in the region. Most recently a house that exemplifies Italianate architecture called the Pemberton place had been saved from a wrecking ball.

White Pageant Dress

A white pageant dress is what Cecelia's mother Camille worn in the photo in the scrapbook and whenever Cecelia sees it, it signifies that her mother is in trouble.

Magnolia Tree

The magnolia tree, once magnificent, was murdered by Violene Hobbs for reasons that Thelma Rae can neither understand nor forgive. The ruined and left over stump is a strong metaphor for the feelings between Thelma Rae and Violene.

Wilder Demolition Company

The Wilder Demolition Company is the company that was hired to demolish the Pemberton house, but the Historic Savannah Foundation had purchased the house and gotten an injunction to stop the demolition.

Polaroid Camera

Tallulah buys Cecelia an instant camera, hoping she'll enjoy it and opening up a new perspective for Cecelia.

Slugs

Slugs are the bane of any gardener's existence and Thelma Rae collects them in a jar and then flings them over the fence to Violene's garden. A slug is also what causes Violene to fall when she steps on one on the porch.

Belladonna

Belladonna is a poisonous flower that Oletta recommended be the flower of choice for the bouquet that Tallulah intends to send to Violene in the hospital.



Fortune Finder

A fortune finder is what Oletta calls her metal detector, which has helped her find many treasures she tells Cecelia.

Magic Stones

Chessie is a stone reader. Almost two hundred years old, her magic stones had been passed from generation to generation, finally finding their way to Chessie from her great-great-great grandmother Omu. A long time ago Omu was born in a village in West Africa called Moboko. Conducting a sacred ritual on the beach, Omu was attacked by a band of men, and she threw her stones to the sea before they could catch up to her. The stones exploded into seven small white birds that circled as the men beat Omu in submission and chained her in the bowels of a ship headed for America. Once there, she was sold to a plantation owner. Crying one night in her bed she saw a fluttering by the window as one by one seven white birds landed on her window sill. She reached up for them, and as soon as she touched them, they turned back into her seven stones. She hid them under the floor, believing if she could get to the ocean she could soak up enough magic to have them turn into bigger birds that would carry her back to Africa. Though that never happened as Omu never made it to the ocean, the stones were handed down, finally finding their way to Chessie. The stones never saved Omu, but when Nadine is attacked on the beach, Chessie swings the bag of stones at her attacker, knocking him unconscious on the beach and allowing them to escape.

Mrs. Hobb's Brassiere

Mrs. Hobb's brassiere is thrown into the bushes in her back yard by Earl Jenkins during an evening tryst, and recovered by Cecelia when she and Oletta sneak into her yard to make use of her pool. The brassiere becomes the focus by which Cecelia plans to drive Mrs. Hobb's crazy, taking photographs with it all over town and then sending them to her anonymously.



Settings

Georgia

Georgia is the state in which Cecelia's mother lived as a younger woman and longed to return to. Cecelia's mother is convinced that in Georgia the women dress nice and the people are friendly and kind – something she hasn't experienced where they now live.

Willoughby, Ohio

Willoughby is where Cecelia and her parents live when this story opens.

Goodwill

The Goodwill store is where Camille begins to shop after Carl cuts up her credit card following a spending spree during which she purchased an over-abundance of shoes.

Willoughby Public Library

The Willoughby Public Library is where Cecelia goes to escape from her life and her parents.

Eastlake Mental Health Facility

Eastlake is the facility that Cecelia tells her father that her mother should be put in to help her with her mental illness, citing her behavior and telling him just a snapshot of what her life was like.

Euclid Avenue

Camille runs out into the road and is hit and killed on Euclid Avenue by a Happy Cow Ice Cream truck. She was wearing her pageant dress and red shoes, but Carl is too embarrassed to explain why to the policeman who questions him. The event is a significant turning point in Cecelia's life as this is when she goes to live with her Aunt Tootie.

Portman Inn

The Portman Inn is where Tallulah tells Carl she is staying, and where he can reach her once he's had time to think about her proposal. She asks that he call her by eight that evening and Carl promises he will, but he already knows what he is going to do.



Savannah

Savannah is where Cecelia's great Aunt Tallulah lives. She has asked that Cecelia come to live with her after her mother dies. This is a significant turning point in Cecelia's life and will have a tremendous impact on her outlook and confidence.

Forsythe Park

Forsythe Park is the park that Aunt Tootie takes Cecelia to on her second full day in Savannah and it is where she explains how the Ladies of Savannah Garden Club was started and why, giving Cecelia greater insight into who her great-aunt is.

Pemberton Place

A remarkable example of Italianate architecture, the Pemberton Place is one of the historic buildings in Savannah that was saved from a wrecking ball by the Historic Savannah Foundation and their fundraising efforts.

Betsy's Belles

Besty's Belles is where Tallulah found and bought the fancy white party dress for Cecelia. It is significant because it is almost an exact copy of the pageant dress Cecelia's mother had worn in the photo in the scrapbook.

Brunswick

Brunswick is where Tallulah was born and where her sister Lucille still lives and runs the family jewelry store.

Brunswick Fine Jewellers

Brunswick Fine Jewelers was founded in 1887 by Tallulah and Lucille's father and has been in the family since. There are long glass cases that are filled with jewelry of all kinds, set out on black velvet cushions.

Raleigh

Raleigh is the town in which Frankie Mae lives, and where Tallulah learns she is in the hospital after suffering a stroke.



Tybee Island

Tybee Island is where Oletta takes Cecelia to go treasure hunting and to see the ocean for the first time.

Green Hills Home

The Green Hills Home is where Oletta's Aunt Sapphire lives. Once a beautiful mansion surrounded with a pecan grove and referred to as a gentleman's farm, it is now a home for the aged.

Georgia Historical Society

The Georgia Historical Society is responsible for saving and helping to restore historical buildings in Savannah and surrounding regions. It is also the first place that Mrs. Hobb's traveling brassiere is first photographed.

General Oglethorpe's Statue

The statue of General Oglethorpe is located in Chippewa Square and is one of the stops for Mrs. Hobb's traveling brassiere.

Cotton Exchange

The Cotton Exchange is located on Bay Street and has a winged lion as a fountain with water streaming from its mouth. Mrs. Hobb's brassiere is photographed draped over one ear and becomes Cecelia's favorite photo of all the travelling brassiere photos.



Themes and Motifs

Forgiveness and Family

Cecelia and her mother both struggle with the concepts of family and forgiveness. Camille begins to change when Cecelia turns nine, and her behavior becomes increasingly erratic and unpredictable. Her outbursts are generally related to her former life – a life that Cecelia doesn't understand. Camille tells her that her father ruined her life, taking her from the only normal place she knew, and dumping her in a world where she was isolated and forgotten. Her anger grows along with her psychosis, and time rewinds as Camille lives more and more in a time long gone. When these episodes occurred, Camille would don her pageant dress and matching shoes; wrap her winning sash around herself and in her crown she would wander through town or go shopping.

Cecelia's embarrassment keeps her from having or making friends or having any kind of a normal life at all and as the years pass, she learns to loathe her mother's episodes and behavior. Cecelia's father is more absent with each passing year, and as Cecelia grows up, she realizes that her father was living with another woman most of the time that he was gone.

By the time Camille is killed, Cecelia has grown to hate her father, just like her mother had. She resents the fact that he left her alone to deal with her mother's illness, and understands that he ran away from the problem rather than dealt with it. He makes excuses for his behavior, but Cecelia doesn't care. She feels abandoned all over again when he sends her to Savannah, and decides that as far as she is concerned, her father is as dead to her as her mother is.

Cecelia begins to heal slowly in Georgia. She spends all of her summer under the loving umbrella of Oletta and Aunt Tallulah. She learns to forgive her mother first, understanding not only the loss she felt when her father moved her to Ohio, but also her illness and the fact that it wasn't her fault. A trip with Oletta to visit her Aunt Sapphire in Green Hills Home shows her that even people with an illness like her mothers can be treated with dignity and respect, and that had her father listened to her when she begged him to take her mother somewhere like this, she would likely still be alive.

It takes longer for Cecelia to forgive her father. She is resentful of the fact that while he was with his 'other woman', Cecelia was stuck looking after her bi-polar mother. She didn't want to forgive him for leaving them, and she certainly didn't want to forgive him for sending her off to live in a place she didn't know with family she'd never met.

During the summer, Carl tries to breach the gap between himself and his daughter. He arrives unexpectedly with a trunk full of the books that Cecelia had been forced to leave behind, but even that gesture and his clumsy apology aren't enough to inspire forgiveness. That comes later. Cecelia finally begins to forgive her father when she



realizes that he was right. She would be much happier in Georgia, and she was grateful to him for sending her away.

Social Graces of the South

Social graces are a point of pride in the southern states and are one of the things that set it apart from the rest of the country. Camille tells Cecelia early on in this story that all she really wants is to return to Georgia where she insists people know how to live, and how to treat each other. She insists that in Georgia, the people are different. They are not only friendly and kind, but they also care about the way they look. All in all, she insists that in Georgia people are simply better in all respects. By comparison, she insists that people from the North are boring and cold. They have no concept of the idea of propriety and none of them has a single bit of etiquette. She tells Cecelia that no one in town is even aware of the fact that she was a pageant queen and they have no idea how to have fun, referring to them as sticks in the mud. More than anything else, Camille wants to turn into a bird so that she would be able to fly back to her home in Georgia and get her old life back again.

When Cecelia is taken to Savannah by her Aunt Tallulah after her mother dies, she begins to understand her mother in a way that she never had before. Thelma Rae Goodpepper teaches her about Camillia shrubs that require warmth to bloom, and won't grow at all above the Mason-Dixon Line. Cecelia can't help but wonder if her mother was more like the flowering bush than she realized, and after her father took her to Ohio, she was geographically doomed. It isn't long before Cecelia gets a real picture of the social differences between Ohio and Georgia. As soon as she'd moved to Georgia, people began stopping in to introduce themselves, and to invite her to come over to visit when she's settled in. The word gets around quickly and most of the people Cecelia meets are as gracious as her mother had always told her they were. Aunt Tallulah and Oletta are warm and welcoming, as are the myriad of women that Tallulah invites to Cecelia's welcoming party. The party itself is an affair to be remembered, done in typical southern style with class and panache. Everyone wears their finest clothes and a spread fit for kings is laid out, all in the name of social graces. None of this would have even been considered in Ohio.

These differences in social etiquette give Cecelia a far better insight into who her mother was, and why she was so disturbed by life in Ohio as compared to her life in Georgia. After only a short summer with Tallulah and Oletta, Cecelia is more at home in Savannah than she'd ever been in Ohio, and she realizes that not only is she safe there but that she belonged. Though her father had promised her that one day she would thank him for sending her to Georgia, she hadn't realized how true that was until she spent a summer there.



Prejudice Pre and Post Segregation

Prejudice is nothing new in the South or anywhere else, for that matter. Cecelia has no idea what prejudice is until she moves to Georgia to live with her Aunt Tallulah. Aunt Tallulah's cook and housekeeper is a black woman named Oletta Jones. Oletta is a happy, loving woman who loves her job and her boss. When Cecelia comes to live with them, Oletta welcomes her with open arms and makes her feel as though she belongs. To Cecelia, the fact that she is black is irrelevant and makes no difference to how she feels about her. In fact, as time passes, Cecelia realizes that she loves Oletta.

When Oletta, Nadine and Chessie take Cecelia to Tybee Island for the day, Cecelia gets her first look at the ugliness of prejudice. Chessie tells Cecelia a story about her great-great-great grandmother Omu who was captured and taken from her home in Africa, sold to a plantation owner in the United States as chattel. Cecelia can hardly believe that people could or would treat each other that way, and the story resonates with her. She is still thinking about it as they are walking back to the car when Nadine is ambushed by a man hiding in the bushes. He robs Nadine, relieving her of her necklace and watch before Chessie materializes and clubs him with her bag of stones. They leave quickly, before he can recover his wits and Cecelia is completely unnerved by the event. She becomes fearful and refuses to leave Oletta's side, unable to even sleep alone in her room, despite the door being left open. She can't understand the venom and hatred exhibited by the man who robbed Nadine, or the viciousness in his behavior. It seems to her that despite the generations that have passed, and the new equality that black people have now, not much has changed in the way some people feel.

The division between the two races is revealed in other ways as well. When Violene Hobbs is in the hospital and her Aunt Tallulah is still in Raleigh, Cecelia tries to convince Oletta to take her into Violene's pool and teach her how to swim. Violene would 'pitch a fit' if she knew Oletta had ever gotten into her pool, she insists, recalling the myriad of times that Violene had referred to her as 'Miz Tootie's nigger'. Despite that, she finally relents. Cecelia is surprised to learn that Oletta has never been in a pool before. Her color and race have always kept her from this kind of luxury.

All in all, Oletta lives a life of race neutrality while she is with Tallulah, but life outside of those walls is still one of mental segregation if not physical. Violene's prejudice is something that Cecelia deeply resents, and when Cecelia finds Violene's brassiere in the bushes, she uses it to mount a campaign to get even with her for her behavior towards Oletta. When Oletta discovers the escapades of the traveling brassiere, she is disappointed in Cecelia but despite that, she can't resist mailing the last letter and photo to Violene anyway.

The Travelling Brassiere

The travelling brassiere is Cecelia's way of getting even with the vengeful and spiteful Violene Hobbs. Cecelia's resentment of Violene begins with their very first meeting when Violene walks into Tallulah's house without so much as knocking, and introduces



herself. That wouldn't have been enough on its own, but then she asks Cecelia point blank how her mother managed to get herself hit by a truck. The lack of sensitivity or class that was displayed with that question is enough to begin Cecelia's dislike of the woman, but it doesn't end there.

Next, Cecelia is told Thelma Rae's story about how Violene murdered a beautiful Magnolia tree in her back yard, solely to prevent a leaf or blossom from dropping into her pool. Of course, the murder of the Magnolia took place while Thelma Rae was out of town, and unable to protect it. She'd come home to find a stump remaining where the majestic tree once grew. With unbridled hatred for Violene, Thelma Rae mounts a campaign to get even with her. Cecelia learns of this campaign quite by accident when she goes next door to return a confederate bill she found in a book Thelma Rae had allowed her to borrow. She discovers Thelma Rae collecting slugs in a jar, happy to have found some that were large enough to do real damage to a garden. Cecelia asks why she is collecting them, and Thelma Rae reveals her spatula, selecting a fat slug and lobbing it over the fence and into Violene's garden. She shows little sympathy for Violene when she appears on the back porch, chased by married policeman Earl Jenkins. Earl is dressed in his underwear and wearing a Zorro mask when he twirls Violene's brassiere like a lasso and it goes flying into the shrubbery nearby.

Cecelia's negative feelings for Violene Hobbs continue when Oletta tells her that several times she'd heard the woman refer to her as 'Miz Tootie's nigger'. That hurtful and insensitive phrase reveals the shallow, vapid woman for who she really is, and when Cecelia discovers Violene's discarded brassiere in the shrubbery, an idea takes shape. Taking her camera and the brassiere, she begins to take photographs of Violene's unmentionables all over town. Then, one by one, she writes notes from the brassiere to Violene and sends them to her, hoping to drive her crazy. What begins as a delicious secret and a great deal of fun changes when Oletta discovers what she is doing and puts an end to it by taking the remaining photos and brassiere from her. Oletta can't help herself however and on her way home, she seals and mails the last envelope. Cecelia happens to witness this act, amused and relieved at the same time.

Raising Children

Raising a child is a responsibility that most parents manage to do, whether they do it well or not, but Cecelia's life is not normal. She doesn't enjoy the kind of childhood that most children do, having to become the adult and take care of her mother from the age of seven forward. Cecelia mostly raises herself, with small interventions by Mrs. Odell next door when things are beyond her capabilities.

When Cecelia's mother dies, Carl is lost. He has no idea what to do with the daughter he barely knows. When Tallulah shows up and offers to take her back to Savannah with her, Carl jumps on the offer, knowing that he is not equipped to look after her, but leaving Cecelia feeling even more abandoned than she already does.



Tallulah turns out to be the best thing that ever happens to Cecelia. She provides everything Cecelia needs, from clothes and food to love and security. Tallulah also provides Cecelia with a good example to follow, and advice that is sensible and useful. From Tallulah, Cecelia learns to find and follow her fire, which will lead to a life of fulfillment. She also learns that friends matter more than possessions and that love conquers all. Where Tallulah is unavailable to help, Oletta steps in, sharing her love and wisdom with Cecelia as well. Oletta teaches Cecelia to be patient with those who are different; trust God in day to day life; and to live life without fear.

Although this story only covers two months of Cecelia's life in Savannah, she is already given a lifetime's good advice and love, giving her the one thing all children need - a home where she is loved and cared for.



Styles

Point of View

Saving CeeCee Honeycutt is a story by Beth Hoffman that is told entirely from the first person perspective of the main character, Cecelia Honeycutt. The story begins with the trials and tribulations Cecelia faces as she tries to cope with her mother's increasingly manic behavior. Suffering from psychosis, her mother often lived in her mind reliving the past and out of touch with the present. She often paraded around town in old and ragged prom dresses she bought from the Goodwill store, constantly believing she was preparing for one pageant or another. She spent a great deal of time obsessing over a photograph taken of her when she won the 1951 Vidalia Onion Queen pageant, forever trying to recapture the youth and beauty of that moment again.

Cecelia reveals a life of constant turmoil and confusion during which she was never sure what she would find when she got home. At times, her mother would retreat for days or even weeks into herself, bemoaning the loss of days gone by, and at other times her mania would have her out on the streets in gown, sash and tiara, begging people who drove by to vote for her and assuring them that she would do Georgia proud. Embarrassed and teased relentlessly, Cecelia avoided being seen in public as much as possible. During one of her mother's manic episodes, she tries to talk Cecelia into going shopping with her to find a gown so that they could attend a mother/daughter competition, but Cecelia refuses. Her mother leaves, assuring her she'll be sorry. It is the last time she will see her mother alive.

Cecelia's father comes home just long enough to make arrangements to send Cecelia to live with her great aunt, and in many ways life for Cecelia begins that day. She relates how her life changes and her mind heals in the care of Tallulah and Oletta, and after a summer of their ministrations, Cecelia is able to accept what became of her parents and of herself, and settle in to a life in the first place she has ever felt like she belonged - Savannah.

Language and Meaning

This is a story that is written in English but with a southern flair. Cecelia's mother dies after being hit by an ice cream truck in Willoughby, Ohio and that is when Cecelia's life truly begins. Cecelia's mother Camille was a southern belle who was swept off her feet by an older man who took her from her home state of Georgia, convincing her to come to Ohio to make a life with him. She did so, but hated it. With each passing year, she complained more about the lack of hospitality or social graces people in the North had, telling Cecelia that northerners were a classless, cold bunch who had no idea what etiquette was.



The death of Camille results in Cecelia being taken back to Georgia - somewhere her mother always promised her they would return to, and in one short summer, Cecelia gains tremendous insight into her mother and how she felt. Until then, Cecelia hadn't understood her ongoing lament regarding etiquette and hospitality, but a simple summer is enough to open her eyes, and make her realize that her mother was right. A large part of southern hospitality is simply making people around you feel welcome. It is an art form that is lost on northerners somehow.

The language of the South is as different as the hospitality is. Words like 'sugar' are used as a form of address; and eccentricities are celebrated or accommodated rather than outcast and ridiculed. Cecelia can't determine the difference between eccentric and crazy, and when she asks Thelma Rae, she isn't sure either. Cecelia can't help but wonder if her mother would have continued to thrive in Georgia as an eccentric had she stayed, especially after witnessing some of the behavior of those around her such as Violenne dressed up like a chicken and Earl in a Zorro mask twirling her bra in circles over his head.

Structure

Saving CeeCee Honeycutt is a story that is divided into thirty chapters which range in length from three to twelve pages in length, averaging eight pages each. The first chapter reveals the illness that Camille Honeycutt is facing and gives the reader a brief insight into Cecelia's life. The second chapter introduces Mrs. Odell, Cecelia's saving grace and stabilizing force. By chapter three, Cecelia's mother is dead and her father is trying to decide what he'll do when Tallulah Calwell enters the picture. She manages to convince Carl to allow her to take Cecelia home with her to Savannah Georgia. Chapters four and five are the last that Cecelia will spend in Ohio.

Chapters six through ten deal with Cecelia settling in to her new home. She meets Oletta, who immediately becomes her friend and confidante. In chapter ten, Cecelia is given a camera and begins to document the people she meets. Oletta takes her to Green Hills where she meets some eccentric women who make her wonder about her mother.

Chapter eleven reveals the animosity between Thelma Rae and Violenne and the lengths with which Thelma Rae is willing to go to get even. In this segment, Cecelia also learns about karma and how the black boomerang of karma and how it applies to Violenne and in chapter thirteen Tallulah goes to Raleigh to sit with a friend in the hospital while in fifteen Oletta takes Cecelia to Tybee Island to see the ocean for the first time. Nadine is mugged as they are leaving the beach and Cecelia is consumed with fear. For several chapters Oletta considers telling Tallulah but Cecelia convinces her not to.

In chapter twenty-two, Cecelia goes with Tallulah to a country farm to get peaches, and has a meltdown when she remembers an episode with her mother, triggered by another mother with her child. It is many hours before Cecelia is able to communicate and explain her fears. In chapter twenty four, school for Cecelia is discussed at the



Rosemont School for Girls. In chapter twenty six, Mrs. Odell comes to Savannah to visit and her intentions to go on to Florida are thwarted when Adele dies. Tallulah offers her home once again.

In chapter twenty-eight, Tallulah announces her intentions to throw a party, and the last two chapters deal with this party and lead up to Cecelia's first day in her new school.



Quotes

Northerners are exactly like their weather – cold and boring.”

-- Camille (chapter 1 paragraph 25)

Importance: Camille tells Cecelia that northerners don't possess a single iota of propriety or etiquette, claiming they are all a bunch of 'sticks-in-the-mud' like her father was. This comment is one of many that reveal the depths of Camille's unhappiness and disappointment with her life.

Mr. Honeycutt, do you know where she was going all gussied up like that in the middle of the afternoon?”

-- Policeman (chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: Carl and Cecelia learn that Camille was hit by an ice cream truck and killed, wearing the pageant dress and crown that she was wearing in the photograph in her scrapbook, and neither of them want to admit to the policeman who asks that she was just headed to the Goodwill to see if there was anything new.

I want you to know that I've got a big ole house with plenty of room, and I'd sure love to have you.

-- Tallulah Caldwell (chapter 5 paragraph 12)

Importance: This is significant to Cecelia in that she'd never really felt welcomed anywhere in her entire life. She'd always simply tried to cope with the life that was put in front of her, but now due solely to the fact that her mother had been hit by a truck and killed, she was being welcomed by a relative she doesn't even know. The fact that Tallulah would 'love to have her' rattles around in her mind, trying to take foothold.

One of the most important things he (His Holiness, the Dalai Lama) teaches is that we're never to cause harm to any living thing.”

-- Thelma Rae Goodpepper (chapter 8 paragraph 71)

Importance: Thelma Rae tells Cecelia about His Holiness the Dalai Lama, explaining the basic tenets of his beliefs, and trying to explain what karma is and how what you do in life is the sum of everything good and bad, and how one should always strive to clean up our individual karmas.

Whether it's taking care of abandoned animals, saving old houses from the wreckin' ball, or reading to the blind, you've got to find your fire, sugar.”

-- Tallulah Caldwell (chapter 9 paragraph 89)

Importance: Tallulah tells Cecelia that the one thing she truly hopes is that Cecelia will find her fire and act on it as by doing so she will find fulfillment in life.



Well, with any luck those slugs will eat half of that evil witch's garden before morning."
-- Thelma Rae. (chapter 11 paragraph 15)

Importance: With this action, Cecelia learns about another side to Thelma Rae and realizes that this is a woman that she would never want to cross or have upset with her.

I know what you probably think of me, and whatever it is, you're right.
-- Carl Honeycutt (chapter 13 paragraph 28)

Importance: Carl stops to see Cecelia and to bring her the rest of her books in Savannah. He tries to explain the reasons he gave up on her mother, and tells her that he knows there is no excusing his behavior. He insists that despite being a lousy father, he wants her to be happy.

Every time you give in to your fears, you're lettin' that man win.
-- Oletta Jones (chapter 16 paragraph 3)

Importance: Oletta talks to Cecelia after Nadine is mugged on Tybee Island and convinces her that every time she gives in to fear, she allows the mugger to become stronger while she weakens and soon she would end up a prisoner to him for the rest of her life.

Don't be callin' me when you can't get that tape off.
-- Oletta (chapter 18 paragraph 27)

Importance: Oletta jokingly tells Thelma Rae that she won't help her when the duct tape she used to 'make her girls perkier' won't come off. It is just one of several examples of what women are willing to do to themselves - Thelma Rae particularly - to continue to look young.

I was having my hair trimmed the other day and everyone in the beauty shop was talking about how it smooths the skin and tightens the bags under the eyes.
-- Thelma Rae (chapter 19 paragraph 13)

Importance: Once again, Thelma Rae reveals her desire to stay young, or to at least appear to remain young despite encroaching years. In this instance, Thelma Rae is purchasing Preparation H for the bags under her eyes, and carrot juice and sea salt to soak in.

Don't forget to show the Lord your grateful heart today.
-- Oletta (chapter 21 paragraph 4)

Importance: Oletta is so relieved that charges will not be filed against them by Lucas Slade that she not only thanks the Lord herself and talks to Him as though he is with her, but also reminds Cecelia to show her gratitude through her actions during the day.



It's what we believe about ourselves that determines how others see us."
-- Tallulah (chapter 24 paragraph 45)

Importance: This quote is one that should be told to every child at some point in their adolescence to reveal the truth – we control our destinies. We choose how the world perceives and treats us.

It's how we survive the hurts in life that brings us strength and gives us our beauty."
-- Camille (chapter 25 paragraph 11)

Importance: This phrase comes back to Cecelia in the night before her first day of school in Savannah, and she realizes the truth of that statement, as well as many other truths her mother told her.

I have no place to go.
-- Mrs. Odell (chapter 27 paragraph 15)

Importance: When Mrs. Odell discovers that Adele is dead, and she is without a home to go to after all, Tallulah once again reveals her ever generous spirit as she insists that Gertrude has a place to call home with them.

You'll be fine - all you gotta do is smile.
-- Oletta (chapter 29 paragraph 2)

Importance: Cecelia is terrified to face the garden party full of women, wearing the dress that reminded her so much of her mother's pageant dress, but Oletta is by her side, giving her strength and comfort.