

Cold Sassy tree

by Olive Ann Burns · Language: EN

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Overview

Olive Ann Burns' "Cold Sassy Tree" is a poignant and humorous coming-of-age novel set in the fictional town of Cold Sassy, Georgia, in 1906. Narrated by fourteen-year-old Will Tweedy, the story unfolds against the backdrop of a scandal that rocks the conservative Southern community: Will's eccentric and fiercely independent grandfather, Rucker Blakeslee, marries the much younger, sophisticated Miss Love Simpson just three weeks after the death of his beloved first wife, Mattie Lou. The novel masterfully captures the clash between traditional Southern values and the stirrings of modernity, as well as the complexities of love, grief, and societal judgment.

Through Will's observant and often witty eyes, readers witness the town's outrage and gossip, the evolving, unconventional relationship between Rucker and Miss Love, and Will's own journey of self-discovery. He grapples with first love, the hypocrisies of adults, and the profound mysteries of life and death. The book explores themes of independence, the courage to defy convention, and the enduring power of human connection, all while painting a vivid portrait of a bygone era in the American South. Its charm lies in its authentic characters, rich dialect, and its ability to blend humor with deeply moving insights into the human condition.

Key Takeaways

- Love can blossom in unexpected ways and defy societal norms, even in the face of widespread disapproval.
- Grief and loss are deeply personal experiences, and individuals process them in unique and sometimes unconventional manners.
- Challenging deeply ingrained traditions can lead to both ostracization and profound personal growth and freedom.
- Coming-of-age involves grappling with the complexities of adult relationships, mortality, and societal hypocrisy.
- Small-town life, with its gossip and tight-knit community, serves as a microcosm for broader human experiences and moral dilemmas.
- Humor and resilience can be found even in the face of tragedy and profound change.
- True independence means living authentically, regardless of others' judgments or expectations.

Chapter Summaries

The Death of Mattie Lou and a Scandalous Proposal

The story opens in Cold Sassy, Georgia, in 1906, introducing fourteen-year-old Will Tweedy and his family. Will's beloved grandmother, Mattie Lou Blakeslee, dies suddenly. Just three weeks later, Will's grandfather, Rucker Blakeslee, shocks the entire town by announcing his intention to marry Miss Love Simpson, a much younger, independent milliner from Baltimore who works in his general store. This impulsive decision sends ripples of scandal and outrage through the conservative community.

A Town in Uproar

The news of Rucker's hasty remarriage to Miss Love ignites a firestorm of gossip and disapproval in Cold Sassy. Will's Aunt Loma, Rucker's daughter, is particularly incensed, viewing the marriage as a disgrace to her mother's memory. Miss Love, despite the town's cold shoulder and social ostracism, maintains her dignity and independent spirit, slowly revealing glimpses of her own complex past and resilience to Will and the reader.

Will's Coming of Age and First Loves

Amidst the adult drama, Will navigates his own adolescence. He experiences the pangs of first love with Lightfoot McLendon, a poor but spirited country girl, and grapples with the confusing hypocrisies and moral ambiguities of the adults around him. Will's observations of his grandfather's unconventional marriage and the town's reactions contribute significantly to his burgeoning understanding of life, death, religion, and human nature.

The Unconventional Marriage Unfolds

Will closely observes the evolving relationship between Rucker and Miss Love. What initially appears to be a marriage of convenience, driven by Rucker's need for companionship and Miss Love's desire for security and a home, gradually deepens. Despite their age difference and differing personalities, a genuine affection, respect, and understanding grow between them, challenging both their own initial expectations and the town's judgmental assumptions.

Tragedy and Legacy

Tragedy strikes when Rucker Blakeslee suffers a severe accident, leading to his eventual death. This profound event deeply impacts Will and Miss Love. The town's initial judgment of Miss Love slowly gives way to a grudging respect for her steadfastness and character. In the aftermath, Miss Love inherits Rucker's store, asserting her independence and securing her place in Cold Sassy, while Will continues his journey of growth, forever shaped by the lessons learned from his grandfather and Miss Love.

Themes

- Coming of Age
- Tradition vs. Modernity
- Love and Marriage
- Grief and Loss
- Small-Town Life
- Individualism

Notable Quotes

- "Death ain't nothing but a word, a punctuation mark, a period at the end of a sentence." — Grandpa Rucker Blakeslee's philosophical view on death, reflecting his pragmatic and unconventional nature.
- "It was the summer of 1906, and I was fourteen years old when my grandmother died." — The opening line of the novel, setting the time and introducing the narrator and the inciting event.
- "When you're dead, you're dead. No use to worry about it." — Another of Grandpa Rucker's blunt and unsentimental statements about mortality.
- "If you don't like the way I do things, then you can just lump it." — Grandpa Rucker's defiant attitude towards societal expectations and criticism regarding his marriage to Miss Love.
- "I reckon I'm just a plain old country boy, but I ain't never seen a woman like Miss Love." — Will Tweedy's internal reflection, highlighting Miss Love's unique and captivating presence in his life and the town.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Cold Sassy tree about?

Cold Sassy Tree is about a fourteen-year-old boy, Will Tweedy, growing up in a small Georgia town in 1906. The story centers on the scandal caused by his grandfather, Rucker Blakeslee, who marries a much younger woman, Miss Love Simpson, just three weeks after his first wife's death. It explores themes of love, loss, tradition, and the courage to defy societal norms through Will's eyes.

Is Cold Sassy tree worth reading?

Yes, Cold Sassy Tree is highly regarded for its rich Southern voice, memorable characters, and blend of humor and poignancy. It offers a vivid historical setting, insightful observations on human nature, and a compelling coming-of-age narrative. Readers who appreciate character-driven stories, Southern literature, and historical fiction will find it a rewarding read.

How does Cold Sassy tree end?

Spoiler: The book ends with Grandpa Rucker Blakeslee dying after a severe accident. Miss Love Simpson, his widow, inherits his store and continues to live in Cold Sassy, maintaining her independence and a strong bond with Will. Will Tweedy continues his journey of growth, reflecting on the profound impact his grandfather and Miss Love had on his understanding of life and love.

Who should read Cold Sassy tree?

Readers who enjoy Southern literature, historical fiction, and coming-of-age stories will particularly appreciate Cold Sassy Tree. It's also suitable for anyone interested in character-driven narratives, explorations of societal norms, and stories that blend humor with heartfelt emotion. It's a classic for those who enjoy a strong sense of place and time.

How long does it take to read Cold Sassy tree?

On average, it takes approximately 6 to 7 hours (360-420 minutes) to read Cold Sassy Tree. This estimate is based on an average reading speed of 250 words per minute and the book's typical length of around 85,000 to 100,000 words.