



Cold comfort farm

By Stella Gibbons

First published in 1932

Genre & subjects

Humorous stories

Farm Life Fiction

Classical Fiction

Synopsis

When sensible, sophisticated Flora Poste is orphaned at nineteen, she decides her only choice is to descend upon relatives in deepest Sussex. At the aptly named Cold Comfort Farm, she meets the doomed Starkadders: cousin Judith, heaving with remorse for unspoken wickedness; Amos, preaching fire and damnation; their sons, lustful Seth and despairing Reuben; child of nature Elfine; and crazed old Aunt Ada Doom, who has kept to her bedroom for the last twenty years. But Flora loves nothing better than to organize other people. Armed with common sense and a strong will, she resolves to take each of the family in hand.

Author biography

Stella Dorothea Gibbons, novelist, poet and short-story writer, was born in London in 1902. She went to the North London Collegiate School and studied journalism at University College, London. She then worked for ten years on various papers, including the Evening Standard.

Her first publication was a book of poems *The Mountain Beast* (1930) and her first novel *Cold Comfort Farm* won the Femina Vie Heuruse Prize in 1933. Amongst her other novels are *Miss Linsey and Pa* (1936), *Nightingale Wood* (1938), *Westwood* (1946), *Conference at Cold Comfort Farm* (1959) and *Beside the Pearly Water* (1954). Her *Collected Poems* appeared in 1950.

In 1933 she married the actor and singer Allan Webb, who died in 1959. They had one daughter. Stella Gibbons died in 1989.

Discussion starters

- Did you like the book cover and title? Did they accurately portray the book inside?
- What is the author trying to achieve with her parody of rural country life?
- How does the descriptive language add to the humour and satire? Or does it?
- Did you find the dialog in the story realistic?
- Did you find the characters believable? Which of the characters did you like the most and which did you dislike?
- Why do you think the author chose to give her heroine, Flora Poste, the least growth or change compared to the other characters in the novel?

- What did you think of the plot line development? How credible did the author make the plot? Did the plot take turns you did not expect, or did you find it predictable?
- In what ways is nature used to typify characters such as Seth, Meriam, and Elfine?
- Sukebind is a recurring motif. When does it appear in the novel and what does it seem to represent in those instances?
- How does gender play a part in terms of power, control, and traditional roles?
- In what ways are the main characters stereotypical and in what ways do they break their archetypes?
- Several “secrets” remain unanswered by the end of the novel, such as what Aunt Ada saw in the woodshed, what Flora’s rights were, and what wrong was done to Flora’s father. Were you disappointed that these questions were never answered?
- Discuss any possible answers to the “secrets” in the book.

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