



Goldengrove

By Francine Prose
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Introduction

At the center of Francine Prose's profoundly moving novel is a young girl facing the consequences of sudden loss after the death of her sister. As her parents drift toward their own risky consolations, thirteen-year-old Nico is left alone to grope toward understanding and clarity, falling into a seductive, dangerous relationship with her sister's enigmatic boyfriend.

Over one haunted summer, Nico must face that life-changing moment when children realize their parents can no longer help them. She learns about the power of art, of time and place, the mystery of loss and recovery. But for all the darkness at the novel's heart, the narrative itself is radiant with the lightness of summer and charged by the restless sexual tension of teenage life.

Goldengrove takes its place among the great novels of adolescence, beside Henry James's *The Awkward Age* and L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you make of the anti-modern elements that pepper the novel: Henry and Daisy, Nico's ex-hippie parents, the town of Emersonville and its resistance to cell phones and BlackBerries, Margaret's fondness for black-and-white movies? Why might Prose have chosen this backdrop for her story, and how does it contribute to the tone and tension of *Goldengrove*?
2. Turn to the book's epigraph, Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem "Spring and Fall: To a Young Child," from which *Goldengrove* takes its name. How has Prose responded to these lines? Unlike the Margaret of the poem, *Goldengrove*'s Margaret will never grow older. What is her role in this narrative?
3. Now consider the novel's final pages. As you read, did you remember that *Goldengrove* has been narrated all along by a "future" Nico, or did this epilogue catch you off guard? How did seeing a now successful adult woman—a professional, wife, and mother—affect your final impression of her story? How might your impression have differed if the novel ended as Nico waves to her "other self" in the streets of Rome?
4. Why might Prose have created the character of Elaine? How do each of Nico's female role models—her mother, Margaret, and Elaine—contribute to her growth and her healing throughout the novel?
5. Consider pain as a concept in this novel: Nico's heart pain, each character's emotional pain, even Daisy's "phantom" pain, as she slips further into her addiction to painkillers. Is pain here something to be fought or embraced? Prevented or accepted? What role does pain play in the grieving, and healing, processes of this family?
6. As Nico and Aaron watch *Casablanca* together, she asks if they're destroying themselves; he replies, "We're repairing ourselves" (p. 146). Do you think their relationship is more destructive or reparative? Can you identify any turning points where their dynamic shifts from one to the other?
7. Has anyone in the group seen or heard Nico's performance of "My Funny Valentine"? Describe it for the others. How did your memory of this performance inform your reading, or shed light on the darkening twists of Prose's story?
8. Francine Prose has written for both adults and young adults, skills that she harnesses to particularly moving effect in *Goldengrove*. Do you think this book is appropriate for younger readers? How might this thirteen-year-old's experiences illuminate and complicate the concept of grief for adult readers?

About the Author

Francine Prose is the author of fifteen books of fiction, including *A Changed Man*, winner of the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and *Blue Angel*, a finalist for the National Book Award. Her most recent book, *Reading Like a Writer*, was a *New York Times* bestseller. A former president of PEN American Center, she lives in New York City.