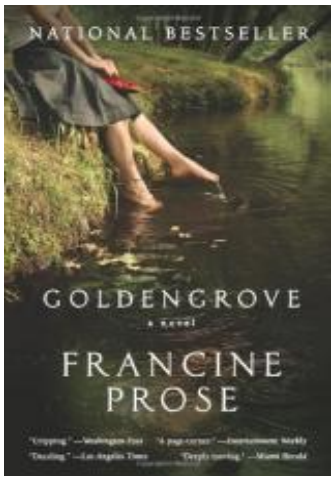
Goldengrove

by Francine Prose



About the Book

Francine Prose, the *New York Times* bestselling author of **Reading Like a Writer** returns with an emotionally powerful novel about love and loss filled with echoes of the classics *Vertigo* and *Pygmalion*

At the center of Francine Prose?s profoundly moving new novel is a young girl plunged into adult grief and obsession after the drowning 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?and to fall into a seductive, dangerous relationship with her sister?s enigmatic boyfriend, Aaron.

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, 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.**

Discussion Guide

1. Francine Prose uses the Gerard Manley Hopkins poem *Spring and Fall: To a Young Child* as the centerpiece for her novel. How does the novel reflect the themes of the poem? How does it diverge from it?

2. Why do you think she named the novel Goldengrove and also the bookstore owned by Nico?s father?

3. Talk about the symbolism of the characters? names, especially Nico and Margaret. Is Margaret real, or is she a manifestation of Nico?s own lost innocence?

4. Compare and contrast the two sisters. What qualities do they share? Why does Nico idolize Margaret? What makes both sisters special?

5. What is the significance of the song ?My Funny Little Valentine? in the novel? What influence does it have on Nico? What does it tell her about her sister and about herself?

6. Early in the story Nico muses, ?I already knew that you couldn?t live in a family without a lie or two as a cushion between you and the people you loved.? Do you agree with this? How did Nico?s lies to her parents about Margaret and herself impact events as they unfolded?

7. Nico?s father described Aaron, Margaret?s artist boyfriend as having a screw loose?the one that holds it all together. Do you agree with this? And how does he hold the story together?and in what ways?

8. What do you think of Aaron? Is he really a creep or just a brokenhearted teenager suffering as Nico does?

9. Nico and her father have a conversation about the bookstore, and about her father?s desire to recommend the right book to help people cope with their problems. Do you think books can help people to do so? Or are books just a form of escape from such problems?

10. One of the secondary stories in the novel is the tale of Williams Miller, his followers, and The Great Disappointment. How is this story reflected in the lives of each of the characters? What is Nico?s father searching for when he takes her on a hunt to find the spot where Millerites expected to meet their angel? What does he find? What does Nico discover?

11. What is Nico?s relationship to Aaron? How does it progress through the novel? What does Nico ultimately learn from it about herself, her sister, and Aaron?

12. The name of the town they live in is Emersonville. Why do you think Francine Prose chose this? What is the significance of the name Mirror Lake? What is Nico?s relationship to the lake?

13. Nico tells us, ?Aaron warned me about looking in the wrong direction. But how did you know what direction was wrong?? How would you answer Nico?

14. How do Nico and her family handle their grief? How have you or someone you know coped with tragedy?

15. What role does Nico?s father?s employee and friend, Elaine, play in the story? How does she get through to Nico? What makes Nico ultimately trust her?

16. Did the novel ring true as a portrait of lost innocence? What other books or movies have you seen or read that touch on the same themes? How does Francine Prose make her portrait unique?

Author Bio

Francine Prose is the author of 23 works of fiction, including the highly acclaimed THE VIXEN; MISTER MONKEY; the *New York Times* bestseller LOVERS AT THE CHAMELEON CLUB, PARIS 1932; A CHANGED MAN, which won the Dayton Literary Peace Prize; and BLUE ANGEL, which was a finalist for the National Book Award.

Her works of nonfiction include the highly praised 1974: A Personal History; ANNE FRANK: The Book, The Life, The Afterlife; and the *New York Times* bestseller READING LIKE A WRITER, which has become a classic.

The recipient of numerous grants and honors, including a Guggenheim and a Fulbright, a Director?s Fellow at the Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library, Prose is a former president of PEN American Center, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is a Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College.

Critical Praise

"Francine Prose has been steadily producing novels, short stories, and criticism shot through with corrosive wit and searing intelligence."

Goldengrove
by Francine Prose

Publication Date: September 1, 2009
Paperback: 288 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0060560029
ISBN-13: 9780060560027