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# COLD COMFORT FARM

STELLA GIBBONS



## COLD COMFORT FARM

Cold Comfort Farm in Sussex is the home of the Starkadder family, and when Flora Poste, their young cousin, decides to go and live with them, she is rather afraid of what she will find there. She knows that people who live on farms in Sussex are bound to be deeply unhappy. They are usually simple country people, close to the earth, working in muddy fields and smelly cowsheds. They are moody, quarrelsome, and confused. It is always raining, and nobody ever laughs.

Her cousins at Cold Comfort Farm meet all her expectations, and more. The Starkadders quarrel and fight, are miserable most of the time, and their farmyard is foul-smelling and dirty. And they are all peculiar in different ways – Amos about religion, Judith about her son Seth, Reuben about his muddy fields, Elfine about her poetry. Worst of all, ancient Aunt Ada Doom can never forget that she saw something nasty in the woodshed when she was two.

Flora, however, is cheerful, efficient, and full of common sense. She disapproves strongly of unhappiness ('so unnecessary') and smelly cowsheds ('so disgusting'). She also has great determination, and the Starkadders have a few surprises coming to them . . .





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*Human Interest*

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## Cold Comfort Farm

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*Retold by*  
Clare West



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## PEOPLE IN THIS STORY

Flora Poste

Mrs Mary Smiling } *friends of Flora's*  
Claud Hart-Harris }  
Charles Fairford, *Flora's second cousin*

Aunt Ada Doom (old Mrs Starkadder)

Judith, *her daughter*

Amos, *Judith's husband*

Reuben } *Judith's sons*  
Seth }

Elfine, *Judith's daughter*

Luke } *Amos's brothers*  
Mark }

Micah

Urk

Ezra } *the Starkadder cousins*

Caraway

Harkaway

Rennet, *Mark's daughter*

Adam Lambsbreath, *the cowman*

Meriam, *the hired girl*

Mrs Beetle, *Meriam's mother*

Richard (Dick) Hawk-Monitor, *a young country gentleman*

Mrs Hawk-Monitor, *his mother*

Ralph Pent-Hartigan, *his friend*

Mr Mybug, *an intellectual*

Earl P. Neck, *a Hollywood film producer*

Dr Adolf Müdel, *a psychoanalyst from Vienna*

# I

## Flora Poste

The education given to Flora Poste by her parents had been too expensive, too full of team sports, and too long. So when they died of a sudden illness within a few weeks of each other, during her twentieth year, Flora was discovered to possess every skill except that of earning enough to live on.

Her father had always been described as a wealthy man, but on his death the lawyers were surprised to find him a poor one. After all the necessary taxes and bills had been paid, his child was left with an income of one hundred pounds a year, and no property.

Flora inherited, however, from her father a strong determination and from her mother an attractive ankle. The first had not been weakened by the fact that she always did what she wanted, nor the second by the violent outdoor sports which she had been forced to play, but she realized that neither was adequate as equipment for finding paid employment.

She decided, therefore, to stay with a friend, a Mrs Mary Smiling, at her house in Lambeth, a fashionable part of London, until she could make up her mind where she and her hundred pounds a year should go.



The death of her parents did not cause Flora much sadness, as she had hardly known them. They had been extremely fond of travelling, and spent only a month or so of each year in England. Flora, from the age of ten, had passed her school holidays at the house of Mary's mother, and when Mary married, Flora spent them at her friend's house instead. She felt, therefore, as if she was returning home when she entered Lambeth, on a dark afternoon in February, a fortnight after her father's funeral.

Mrs Smiling had inherited three houses in Lambeth when her husband died, and now lived in the pleasantest of the three, number 1, Mouse Place, facing the River Thames. One of the others had been sold, and the third had been rented out as a gentlemen's club.

'How glad I am,' she occasionally said to her close friends, 'that poor Tod left me all his property! It *does* bring in such a lot of money.' Like all people who have been disagreeably poor and have become deliciously rich, Mrs Smiling had never grown used to her money, and always took delight in thinking what a lot of it she had. And all her friends looked on with approval, as if she were a nice child with a toy.

Mrs Smiling had two interests in life. One was bringing reason and common sense to the hearts and minds of about fifteen gentlemen of good family and fortune who were madly in love with her, and who had gone to work in such wild and distant places as Jhonsong La Lake M'Luba-M'Luba and the Kwanhattons because of her refusal to marry them. She wrote to them all once a week, and they (as her friends were only too aware, because she was always reading aloud long, boring bits from their letters) wrote to her. These gentlemen were known collectively as 'Mary's Explorers' by her social circle.