

The Rose of Goodwood Discussion Questions

1. Classism is a persistent theme in the novel. Tallahassee society is shocked when William Cabot Hodges chooses Margaret Wilson to be his wife. Is Hodges correct in his “Pygmalion” bet with Frank Winthrop that any woman can learn the skills needed to be part of the aristocracy and run an upper-class household? What strengths allow Margaret to overcome the aristocracy’s objections? How does class affect Blacks differently than Whites during that time period?
2. Mrs. Garner’s charm school suggests a young woman can be a rose or a cabbage, her choice. How does this idea affect Margaret? Later, Tom Hood offers Margaret a different view of roses versus cabbages. How does his opinion affect her?
3. Will Hodges was a great man, but not always a great husband. What duties of a husband does he perform well? How does he fail? What were his greatest contributions to the state of Florida?
4. After Will’s death, how does Margaret’s life change?
5. How is Margaret’s relationship with Tom Hood different from that of Margaret and Will? What factors account for the differences?
6. Sorrow and loss come into every life. What sorrows befall Margaret?
7. What weaknesses did the story reveal about Margaret? Does she overcome them, and if so, how?
8. Did you learn anything surprising about Tallahassee history from the novel? In what ways did the town change over the course of Margaret’s life?
9. How did the author’s use of other voices besides Margaret’s affect the story?
10. Susannah Ross and Margaret clash in the story. What accounts for their antagonism? How does Margaret finally bring a measure of peace to their relationship?