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# Taking care of Moses

Irene Halliday

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O'Connor, Barbara. *Taking Care of Moses*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004. ISBN 0374380384. \$16.00. 144 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Secrets--Juvenile fiction; Conduct of life--Juvenile fiction; Interpersonal relations--Juvenile fiction; Church--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Possessing a secret can often be fun and exciting, but sometimes it is like a "hot, heavy blanket" of worry. Randall Mackey's secret is so heavy, that he finds it difficult to behave normally, even around his best friend Jaybird. He knows which woman left the baby in the cardboard box on the front steps of the Rock of Ages Baptist Church because he saw her. But, he is afraid to tell anyone, because Queenie Avery, a senile elderly woman, who was out wandering, saw the woman, too. If townspeople discovered that Queenie had gotten away from her husband's watchful care again, they would insist that she be taken from him and institutionalized for her own safety. Randall just couldn't let that happen to kindly Mr. Avery.

After only a few days, the small, southern town of Foley, South Carolina, becomes a hotbed of debate over who should take care of baby Moses, so named by Charlotte Jennings, the preacher's childless wife, who is caring for the baby. Many folks feel that Miss Frieda, the licensed foster care person for Foley, should be caring for Moses and don't hesitate to say so. The feud becomes so warm, that some people refuse to come to the Rock of Ages Church again, driving clear to the next town for their church-going. Neighbors break off relationships with neighbors, and the whole town is in turmoil. Randall wants it all to stop and to make things right, but how can he do it when he is afraid for Mr. Avery and Queenie?

O'Connor once again tells a story filled with imperfect but genuinely good people, who really care about each other as they share their lives in a small town. The humorous, frustrating and poignant moments awaken our compassion and the desire for an outcome that will satisfy the needs of all concerned. How refreshing that age, race, and economic status, though present in the story, are complete non-issues as people struggle to bring about "the right thing" for baby Moses. Characters are allowed to be upset with each other, to encourage each other, to overcome friction, and to grow and improve as the story progresses. Children and adults will recognize themselves and their feelings as they read, and perhaps learn to be a little more understanding and kind.