

Greenleaf by flannery o'connor



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Greenleafs of May Family trees that begin as seedlings can grow tall and strong when braced against the weather. They can also grow barren and parched when succumbing to the easy winds of summer. The short story "Greenleaf" by Flannery O'Connor describes the slow and steady process a family goes through when confronted with the elements of life. Told through the eye of a neer-do-well dairy farmer, Mrs. May perceives herself as a cut above everyone else. She scorns her hired help for their race as much as she detests their success. She loathes her own children but still manages to provide for them. She is inwardly tormented by a world that is not of her making and outwardly by a wild bull that is eating away at what little peace she has left on earth. The Greenleaf sons were content with their modern dairy operation while Mr. Greenleaf and his wife, "... lived like the lilies of the field, off the fat that she struggled to put into the land". "Greenleaf" is a story of families and faith. .

Mrs. May had hired the Greenleafs after her husband passed away and left the dairy farm to her and her two sons. When they were hired, Mr. Greenleaf and his two sons brought along Mrs. Greenleaf and 5 little girls. At this point in their history the families were not remarkably different. Mr. Greenfield's total possessions were little more than a "... pieced-together truck, his wife and five daughters". Mrs. May had inherited little more than that from her husband. Her friends were awestruck that she had gone "... practically penniless and with no experience, out to a rundown farm...". Still, Mrs. May viewed herself as a remarkable woman. The hired help were a necessary annoyance.

The sons also grew in different directions. The Greenleaf boys, O. T. and E. T., spent a successful stint in the Army and returned with their new wives to

set up a successful dairy business. Tormented by her own sons' failures, Mrs. May attributed E. T.'s and O. T.'s success to government handouts. Even the closed windows on their house would cause Mrs. May to wonder, "... if the government could have air-conditioned the thing". The Mays boys were dissatisfied with their existence. Wesley hated everything; the school, the drive, the students, and the farm. Scofield would feign happiness, yet the best thing he could say for himself was, " I'm the best nigger-insurance salesman in this county!". The four seeds had branched into very different family trees.

Mrs. May and Mrs. Greenfield were very similar people living in a world apart. Mrs. May was a proper Christian with a " large respect for religion" that was held in check by her unwillingness to show emotion. Mrs. Greenfield had the same proper religion, but it would pour out at a moment's notice. When Mrs. Greenleaf was lying in the road screaming, " Jesus, Jesus", Mrs. May was aghast and winced. " She thought the word, Jesus, should be kept inside the church building...". God had planted two similar seeds that had grown to become the trunk of very different family trees.

Two families, four sons, and two mothers that had the same similar opportunities in the same universe and worshipping the same God became very different family trees. When Mrs. Mays died all she left was the progeny who would never marry as the tree would wither and die, while the Greenleaf's would continue to prosper bent against life's wind and rain.