



## THE PECAN MAN

CASSIE DANDRIDGE SELLECK



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The Pecan Man is a work of Southern fiction whose first chapter was the First Place winner of the 2006 CNW/FFWA Florida State Writing Competition in the Unpublished Novel category. In the summer of 1976, recently widowed and childless, Ora Lee Beckworth hires a homeless old black man to mow her lawn. The neighborhood children call him the Pee-can Man; their mothers call them inside whenever he appears. When the police chief's son is found stabbed to death near his camp, the man Ora knows as Eddie is arrested and charged with murder. Twenty-five years later, Ora sets out to tell the truth about the Pecan Man. In narrating her story, Ora discovers more truth about herself than she could ever have imagined. This novel has been described as *To Kill a Mockingbird* meets *The Help*.

## **The Pecan Man Details**

Date : Published January 1st 2012 by Pecan Man

ISBN : 9780615590585

Author : Cassie Dandridge Selleck

Format : Paperback 144 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, American, Southern

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## From Reader Review The Pecan Man for online ebook

### Lawyer says

#### The Pecan Man: One Most Folks Would Rather Not See

*The Pecan Man by Cassie Dandridge Selleck was selected by members of On the Southern Literary Trail as a group read for January, 2016. Special thanks to Jane for nominating this novel.*

#### *Down at the Star Market*

*The people Jesus loved were shopping at the Star Market yesterday.  
An old lead-colored man standing next to me at the checkout  
breathed so heavily I had to step back a few steps.  
Even after his bags were packed he still stood, breathing hard and  
hawking into his hand. The feeble, the lame, I could hardly look at them:  
shuffling through the aisles, they smelled of decay, as if the Star Market  
had declared a day off for the able-bodied, and I had wandered in  
with the rest of them—sour milk, bad meat—  
looking for cereal and spring water.  
Jesus must have been a saint, I said to myself, looking for my lost car  
in the parking lot later, stumbling among the people who would have  
been lowered into rooms by ropes, who would have crept  
out of caves or crawled from the corners of public baths on their hands  
and knees begging for mercy.  
If I touch only the hem of his garment, one woman thought,  
could I bear the look on his face when he wheels around?*

*Marie Howe, from The Kingdom of Ordinary Time: Poems, W.W. Norton & Company, 2008*

Face it, we pass by others almost daily without giving them a second look. Because they don't look like us. They have no where to go. They make us uncomfortable. They make us fear becoming like them. By their very appearance. And, in our neighborhood, seeing one of those different from us, makes us think they do not belong there. They must be up to something. Lock the doors. Bring it up at the next neighborhood association meeting. Perhaps report the offender to the Neighborhood Crime Watch Program.

Cassie Dandridge Selleck has written a thoughtful tale of one of those "others" in The Pecan Man. It is a simple tale, almost fable like. And I enjoyed it, up to a point.

It is 1976 in the small southern town of Mayville. The residents there embrace their town as a reflection of Macomb, Alabama, of To Kill a Mockingbird. One jokes, "That May sure gets around." It is an indication that not many things have changed since the 1930s. But they have. Mayville seems unaffected by The Voting Rights Act of 1965. Yet, the Civil Rights Movement was still active in the 1970s. These were the years of school desegregation. The times are changing.

Ora Lee Beckworth, a recent widow, narrates the story.

***“The events of that year were the real driving force behind the mass exodus from the neighborhood. It was the year of the Pecan Man. None of us knew how much impact one skinny old colored man could have in our lives, but we found out soon enough.”***

***“When you’re as old as I am, it takes a while to make a point. The Pecan Man had a name - Eldred Mims. I called him Eddie. The people of Mayville didn’t know his name at all, until he was arrested and charged with the murder of a sixteen year old boy named Skipper Kornegay.”***

Ora Lee, through this short novel, must acknowledge she has looked the other way. In the process she learns a great deal of truth about herself. She surprises us by telling that after twenty-five years, she has decided to tell the truth about the Pecan Man no matter what the cost. Twenty years after Eldred Mims was tried and convicted for the murder of Skipper Kornegay, who just happened to be the son of the County Sheriff.

***“Once a lie is told, you have to keep on telling it. You not only have to repeat it time and time again, you have to embellish it, layer upon layer until you don’t even remember the truth.”***

Ora Lee is not without her faults. She is a flawed character, which she comes to realize. In her 1970s world, Ora Lee hires Eldred Mims to cut her grass. She has a maid Branch Lowery, whom she requires to wear a uniform. They are servants to her.

But through the course of the story, Blanche, her children, Grace, Patrice, ReNetta, and the Pecan Man become intimately known to her. Ora Lee learns that family does not mean only blood kin. Each of these former servants and the children become an integral part of her life. In sharing Thanksgiving and Christmas with them, she is transformed into a much more loving and caring woman.

Why was Skipper Kornegay killed? Why was the Pecan Man arrested? Why did Ora Lee Beckwith withhold the truth for twenty-five years before deciding to tell the truth?

These are the questions that form the central themes of Selleck's novel. To disclose the answers would spoil this nice story for future readers. I won't do that.

As the reader discovers the answers to those questions, a quandary arises. The individual reader must decide whether they find themselves comfortable with Ora Lee's tale, or whether the Truth of the matter makes them squirm with what to me were uncomfortable answers. Perhaps, reader, you find this remark cryptic. Accept it. Each reader must determine their reaction to this story.

Without doubt, this is a poignant story that has the possibility of touching the reader in more ways than one. None of us is perfect. Being human, we make mistakes we regret and wonder whether we or deserving of forgiveness or the hope of redemption. In some ways, each of us owes a debt for each of our mistakes. Eldred Mims sums it up:

*"I reckon I'm the bes' judge of that. Sometimes the debt you pay ain't exactly the one you owe, but it works out jus' the same anyway. Lord knows I done caused my share of heartache in this life."*

Hasn't everyone? The heart of every fable is the moral of it. Each reader must determine the moral of this one. You may find some truth about yourself when you do. Perhaps, go shopping down at the Star Market.

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### **Cathrine ?? says**

#### **3.75★**

At just under 150 pages this is a small gem and perfect reading material during those in between times when you need something that will not make demands on you.

As an added bonus I could only find it in audio format which I usually avoid because I get too easily distracted. It was expertly narrated and settled on me like home-style comfort food over a cold rainy weekend. No problem for me at all staying focused or kept in a state of enjoyment.

During the 1970s in a small southern town an ugly crime begets another resulting in a murder charge. Racial tensions, secrets and lies, and the beginning of a long friendship between two women ensues. Only one of them knows the truth but not the whole story. By the last page the reader will but it's also about the journey getting there.

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### **Cathy says**

Spent a day at the beach with "The Pecan Man". Loved this book! I'm taking a break from mysteries and enjoying some time spent in the South. The Kitchen House got me started with a story of the south during the 1800s. The Dry Grass of August and The Pecan Man take place in the 50s. If you liked The Help, you'll want to read all three of these. I'm finding the relationships between the whites and blacks most interesting, especially the white children and their maids, who pretty much took over parenting. Unfortunately, the

characters in all of these books follow the same stereotypical pattern of blacks-good guys, whites -bad guys with an occasional nice white lady.

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### **Tom Mathews says**

I almost didn't read *The Pecan Man*, pronounced *PEE-can*, but several friends whose judgement I have come to trust convinced me to give it a shot. The fact that it was pretty short and a good candidate for a book that I could read with my teenage daughter tipped the scale. I'm very glad that it did.

*The Pecan Man* takes place in the fictional town of Mayville, in Central Florida in 1976. It tells the story of Ora Lee Beckworth, an elderly white woman, Blanche Lowery, her friend and maid, and Eldred Mims (aka the *pee-can man*), a homeless black man who tends Ora Lee's yard. It is a story of racism, a horrific crime and brutal revenge but mostly it is the story of family and a wonderful friendship that crosses the color line. Although it is fiction, it reads very much like a true story. Too often in fiction the trauma caused by evil deeds is washed away by the story's resolution. The urge to wrap things up in a neat package often takes place at the expense of reality. It is truly remarkable that the first thing my daughter said when I finished reading it to her was, "Is this a true story?"

Bottom line: I owe a great debt to the friends who recommend this beautiful book. I would really like to pay it forward and convince other friends to pick this book up. You won't regret it.

FYI: On a 5-point scale I assign stars based on my assessment of what the book needs in the way of improvements:

\*5 Stars – Nothing at all. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

\*4 Stars – It could stand for a few tweaks here and there but it's pretty good as it is.

\*3 Stars – A solid C grade. Some serious rewriting would be needed in order for this book to be considered *great or memorable*.

\*2 Stars – This book needs a lot of work. A good start would be to change the plot, the character development, the writing style and the ending.

\*1 Star - The only thing that would improve this book is a good bonfire.

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### **Candi says**

4 stars

Ora Lee Beckworth is a woman I just had to admire for her spunk, her flaws, her desire to do the right thing, and her growth as an individual. Set in Florida during the mid-1970's, the widowed Ora Lee lives a very comfortable life with the assistance of her black housekeeper, Blanche Lowery, a single mother of five struggling to make ends meet. When Eldred Mims, a homeless black man known to the town citizens as The Pecan Man, sets up residence in the nearby woods, racism rears its ugly head. When Ora Lee hires the docile Eldred Mims to help out with the yard work, she learns a lot about herself as well as her relationships with not only this man but with Blanche as well. When tragedy strikes, the finger is pointed at Eldred Mims, but Ora Lee knows the truth. But if justice is served at the price of great sacrifice, then how does one make the choice to come forward with the truth?

A tale of friendship and family that crosses barriers, **The Pecan Man** is a lovely short novel with some hopeful messages. Where there are wrongs, there are still those trying to do right. Despite great sorrow, one can still experience joy. Ora Lee tells us a story that will warm your heart even as you shudder at the cruelties and injustices in this world.

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### **Carol says**

A delightful and sometimes heartbreaking tale of friendship, revenge and bigotry. The audio was outstanding.

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### **Jen says**

It's the 70's. A crime happens to a young black child. A white has committed the crime but a black takes the fall. Lies and truths start to blend.

But really this is more about Ora Lee Beckworth, a southern charming widower who knows the truth and it's through her eyes we relive her experience. She's a very likeable character always trying to do the right thing—regardless of what others think. This is a story about friends whom become family and also about loyalty and love.

This is a gem of a debut which took me going through hoops to get it as wasn't at city library or bookstore and I finally got my hands on it from another city library. Was well worth the wait. 4.25\*

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### **Karen says**

So I really liked this book set in Florida, beginning in the 1960's, mostly about a wealthy white widow, her black maid, and a homeless old black man who lives in the woods. It's an endearing story that also deals with a rape, murder, and kept secrets. It also deals with the racial issues of that time.

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### **Linda says**

Yep, The Pecan Man kept nudging me along the way. He left tiny bits of shells here and there that seemed to crunch under foot. "I know that you are there waiting in the stillness. I promised." Until a crisp, unsoiled copy lay on a side table at the library book sale. I bit in and cracked open this ol' nut with much surprise.

The heat of summer blanketed the small town of Mayville, Florida. It's 1976 and America is caught up in the throws of bi-centennial fever. A fever felt by many and a barely registering pulse in the midst of the forgotten. The fireworks elicit a tilt of the head toward the night sky while leaving the grounding reality of life in total darkness where one stands on their side of the street.

Ora Lee Beckwith, a recent widow, hires an old homeless man to do her yardwork. He's been seen up and down the neighborhood on his ancient, rusted bicycle. He's been tabbed with a name by the locals. It's Pecan

Man coming down the street garnering pecans left in the gutters and distant sidewalks. But to Ora Lee, he will become Eddie and he will become the most dynamic agent of change in her life.

And you will experience a transformation before your eyes as you turn page after page. Together with her stoic maid, Blanche, Ora Lee will take you on a journey that will leave you frustrated beyond words, exasperated at the lowly ignorance of people in high positions, and wounded by the sheer disregard of humanity found in its legal system.

For you see, crimes have been committed and crimes have been buried deeply in the soil of this community. Your voice is your word, but your word can never be voiced.

"I ain't sayin' nothin' about the boy. Not now, not ever."

So open this small novella and find what lies within the core of The Pecan Man. I assure you. Flaws float to the surface and leaves are forced to accept the change in their Autumn colors. Colors, ironically, as natural and as right as the very air that we all breathe for survival itself.

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### **PorshaJo says**

Rating a 4.5

I am glad I did not write up my best books of the year yet....as this one is sure to make the list. Southern literary fiction at it's finest. The Pecan Man tells the story of "Eddie" Mims, the Peecan Man as the kids call him, and what happened that year to him in the summer of 1976. But more importantly, it introduces the wonderful character of Mrs. Ora Lee Beckworth. Ora Lee is recently widowed and hires the Pecan Man to do mowing and gardening around her house a few days a week. Ora Lee is fiesty and \*very\* strong willed, yet she oozes that good ol' southern charm. The Pecan Man is accused of the murder of the local police chief's son when he is found near where he camps/lives. But Ora Lee knows that Eddie did not commit this murder.

In the 70's in the south, racism was everywhere, blacks were somewhat segregated still, and when a crime was committed, they were the first to be accused. So no one is shocked when Eddie is put in jail for the rest of his life for his murder. Now, twenty five years later, Ora Lee is telling her story of that fateful night in an effort to clear Eddie's name. More importantly, she learns how one lie spins a web of many lies, in which you must remember each and every one of them, and that there are consequences that you must face for this.

I listened to this one via audio and it was wonderful. One of my top audios of all time. The narrator was amazing and really brought this story to life. I ended up grabbing this one due to all the high praise I have seen about it on GR and I'm so glad I did. It deserves all this praise and more. I strongly suggest if you have yet to read this one, try the audio. A wonderful gem from Cassie Dandridge Selleck that I look forward to re-reading in the near future.

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### **Diane S ? says**

Sometimes you can just start reading a book and tell, this book will break your heart and it did. A very simply told story by a very flawed Ora. A story with many moral implications and one that left me wondering what I would have done? Would I have done differently? Very interesting to contemplate. This short novel packs quite a bit within its pages. Sadness, atrocities, prejudice, helplessness, revenge and bravery by a man I could not help but admire. A wonderful but heartbreakin read.

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### **Sara says**

Don't be fooled by the slender appearance of this novel, it is meaty. It speaks to the time in which it is set, 1976 Mayville, Florida, but it speaks to today just as clearly and it teaches lesson about where we have been and also where we are now.

I could not help thinking about all the homeless individuals that crowd our city streets, who are passed by daily and treated like the great unwashed. Beneath each of those faces is a person, an individual, and while some of them might fit the stereotypes we impose upon them, most do not, but if we never look beyond the surface, we will never know that. Selleck's pecan man is one of those individuals. Ora Lee initially sees only his surface, but as the novel progresses, we are allowed to see beneath it and glimpse the complicated human being who occupies his skin.

And, skin is also a theme. The color of skin is a subject that gets discussed often these days, and in literary circles the tales that involve skin color are often so lopsided that you are only hearing one voice or another. Selleck has managed to allow us to hear all the voices. She has created flawed human beings, who make earth-shattering decisions because they must, and sometimes choose the wrong path and sometimes do not know, even twenty-five years later, if the path they chose was the correct one. Because paths, like people, are hard to define. They are made up of so many twists and turns and unseen corners. I loved all the people in this book: Ora Lee, Eldred Mims, Blanche Lowery, Marcus, Judge Harley Odell, Chip Smallwood...I loved them because if you scratch their skin, they bleed, and if you want to pigeonhole them, they defy you.

One of the lessons I took away from this book was that we can mean the best, be good and kind people, and still we can hurt someone or hold them back with some subtle behavior that we are cognitively unaware of. What makes Ora Lee a wonderful woman is not that she is perfect, but that she strives to see her flaws and when she does to correct them. Can we ask anything more of one another than that?

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### **Carol says**

**"Once you tell a lie, you have to keep tellin' and tellin' and tellin' to make it stand."**

Ora Lee Beckworth is a widow, but one matter-of-fact tough little southern lady. She is generous, protective of her friends, and has a **big** secret.

As she narrates the truth about the homeless "Pee-can" man who lives in the woods and mows lawns for a living in this wonderful story, she introduces the reader to a whole brood of well-drawn characters that she

welcomes into her home and calls her own.

**THE PECAN MAN** is a debut and only 146 pages, but full of heart and soul and just a great read!

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### **Elyse says**

Audiobook -

Immediately, I thought of "To Kill A Mockingbird" as I listened to this story on my walks, which is one of my favorite books in the world! There is a similar feeling and atmosphere .....

Compare the stories or not... I Absolutely loved listening to THIS story...

The narrator's voice gave me confidence that I was in good hands. She was warm, extremely kind, and trustworthy.

Here is another book where over a thousand readers on Goodreads have read it before me. The overall rating is 4.3. I'm giving it a solid 5 stars!

Thank you to several friends who told me to read this book without telling me of anything about it. The author is self published - first novel ---kudos to the author: Cassie Dandridge Selleck.

Great natural flowing storytelling - intimate with the characters, wonderful dialogue-- loved the accents of the characters on the audiobook.

A cozy warm feeling spread through my own body from:

.....the relationships ( appreciations and love of each other)

.....sharing cups of tea,

.....shopping at JC Pennies,

.....eating a hot dog and Cherry Coke at Woolworths,

.....buying 4 bicycles for 4 young girls for a Christmas present

.....storytelling while polishing silver

I loved the intimacy of the dialogue.

The deeper issues are as sad as can be ... and just because we've heard them before, doesn't make them any less sad. There's a heartbreakin story being told!

There is NO QUESTION that this was well written... engaging....and emotionally felt!

For walkers .... or Commuters: I highly recommend this audiobook. It's the type of story where we - as readers & listeners - elevate our own energy, spirit and heart.

Nourishment for the soul!

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## **Brina says**

I give around 4.3 stars to The Pecan Man, a debut self published novel by Cassie Dandridge Selleck. A native of northern Florida, Dandridge got the ideas for the three main characters in the novel from her Leesburg upbringing. Only 136 pages, the novel, which I have dubbed To Kill a Mockingbird meets A Time to Kill, packs a punch.

Ora Lee Beckworth has only been widowed for a little under a year when she hires Eldres Mims to mow her lawn and tend her shrubbery. Beckworth tolerates all people but her neighbors lead by Dovey Kincaid start spreading rumors about the homeless black man and plead with Beckworth to fire him. Meanwhile Blanche Lowery her loyal housekeeper for over thirty years feels uncomfortable around him as well yet can not pinpoint it. Beckworth allows Mims to keep his job.

One day Beckworth arrives home from an errand to find Blanche rocking her youngest daughter Grace on a porch chair. Horrifyingly it turns out she has just been raped by the town police chief's only son. In the post civil rights, south, however, Blanche could not report the crime because the town still sees things in black and white. At this time, Ora Lee, in need of more companionship of her own, brings the Lowery family into her home and treats them as family. Yet many things go unspoken between Ora Lee and Blanche, creating a web of lies that would last for many years.

As the book progresses, Ora Lee grows closer to Blanche and her daughters, while also growing closer to Eldred Mims. You can see that Ora Lee is a respected member of her community, having taught many of the younger generation in Sunday school, and having a vested interest in their lives. It is from this unique vantage point that she is able to assist Eldred Mims and the Lowery family in the horrible things that befall them as the book moves towards its denouement.

It is alarming to think that as recent as the late 1970s that racism still reared its ugly head in the south. Yet, unfortunately, that still exists today. Vacationing many times in Florida, I witnessed a schism in white and black society. Blacks are today still accused of crimes they may or may not have committed. Selleck here paints a picture of a Florida community in the post civil rights era, where unfortunately most people still see things in black and white.

I enjoyed this book as a poignant debut by Cassie Dandridge Selleck. I would recommend The Pecan Man to those looking for quality southern style fiction, and I look forward to reading more works by the author.

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