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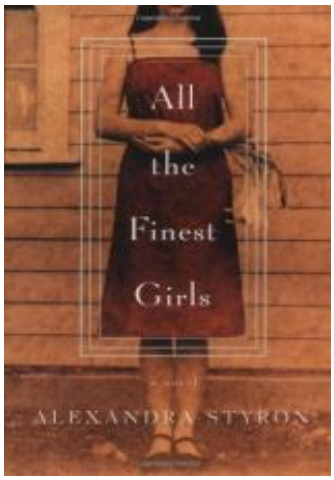
All the Finest Girls: A Novel

by Alexandra Styron



About the Book

This vibrant and emotionally searing novel charts the intersection of two lives, two worlds, as it tells the story of a fierce and untamable young girl, growing up "privileged" in a New England household darkened by her parents' epically unhappy marriage, and the Caribbean nanny who has left her own family a thousand miles behind to live among strangers. **All the Finest Girls** moves and surprises with its tale of finding a sense of belonging in an unexpected place.

Discussion Guide

1. Why does Adelaide go to St. Clair? Who is she trying to help?

2. What parallels exist between Addy and Louise's journeys away from home, if any?

3. How do Addy's childhood feelings of neglect and isolation affect her adult life?

4. Is Cat real? What does Cat symbolize?

5. Is Addy crazy? Was she ever?

6. Did Lou love Addy as she would her own child, or, as Derek says, was she merely caring for Addy to get paid?

7. Did Louise commit suicide, or, as Marva says, does she just "lose her head and fall in the ocean"? Either way, can Errol be considered responsible for her death? What does Derek think?

8. Can Derek, Philip, or even Errol's professional shortcomings be attributed to Lou's absence from their lives?

9. Does Addy feel responsible for Errol not marrying Lou? If Lou had stayed in St. Clair, would Errol have married her?

Or is it Errol who drove Lou away in the first place?

10. Is it possible that Addy truly considers Lou her equal, a part of her family, or is she denying her own racist tendencies?

11. Is Addy responsible for inspiring Derek's anger? Or, as Phillip tells Addy, is it just that "Derek would have been pissed if he'd been born the Duke of Windsor"?

12. Do Derek and Phillip ever see Addy the way she comes to see them, as a "true sibling"? Is there any sexual tension between Addy and either of Lou's sons?

13. Why is there no evidence of Addy, or even the United States, in Lou's St. Clair bedroom?

14. Addy contemplates leaving St. Clair several times. At one point, she even hires a taxi and packs her bags. Is this desire to flee unique to St. Clair, or an extension of her lifelong instinct to run away, to "get out of herself"? How does she overcome her fear and sense of alienation? Why does she even try?

15. When Addy is introduced to Errol at the funeral party, he acts as though they had never met. Did they meet on the beach, or was it one of Addy's blackouts, or perhaps a heat stroke-induced fantasy?

16. How does Lou's death and her funeral change Addy? Does she get over her sense of being an outsider, her feeling of "otherness," her feeling of being "invisible"?

17. Neither of Addy's parents gave her the kind of love she sought as a child. What kind of mother is Baby? What kind of father is Hank? Is either of them ever exonerated in Addy's eyes?

18. Has Addy been mourning an unhappy childhood, or has she been grieving the loss of her youth? Why?

19. What does Addy learn about the comfort of being loved versus the joy of loving others?

Author Bio

Alexandra Styron is the author of a novel ALL THE FINEST GIRLS and most recently READING MY FATHER: A Memoir. A graduate of Barnard College and the MFA program at Columbia University, Alexandra's work has appeared in several anthologies as well as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Avenue*, *Real Simple*, and *Interview* among other publications. She lives with her husband and two children in Brooklyn, New York.

Critical Praise

"Haunting.... A finely woven, almost delicate, tapestry....Styron's finest achievement is her ability to glide seamlessly between the dialect of St. Clair and the cultured language of Connecticut as she pieces together the fragments of each of these women's lives." *?Amy Ephron, Los Angeles Times*

"Perfect observations leap off the page.... The deftness of the local color and the haunting details of never-to-be-outgrown pain are promises of good things to come for Alexandra Styron." *?Rosellen Brown, New Leader*

"A virtuoso performance, a remarkably perceptive and finely tuned story that addresses the tough questions of love, loss, and redemption with deadly accuracy tempered by gentle humor." *?Mary Garrett, BookPage*

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