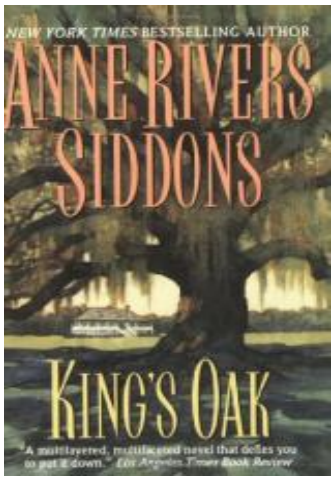
ReadingGroupGuides
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King's Oak

by Anne Rivers Siddons



About the Book

Fleeing a disastrous marriage and an abusive husband, Andy Calhoun and her frightened young daughter, Hillary, head for the small town of Pemberton, Georgia, "in search of banality" and calm. Instead, she finds herself caught up in the intrigues of the elite old families of Pemberton. Just as she begins to assimilate to her new world of horse racing and society dinners, she meets Tom Dabney, the wild prodigal son of Pemberton society who lives in a magical house out in the woods. An exuberant poet who worships the wilderness, Tom both fascinates and repels Andy. Rumors about Tom's strange pagan rites hint at possible madness, and Andy resolves to keep herself and her daughter away from him. Nevertheless, against her better judgment, Andy finds herself becoming immersed in his life and his strange, mystical world. He and his house at Goat's Creek prove to have a profound healing effect on the traumatized Hillary, who longs to learn all the ways of the forest from Tom. As Hillary develops into a woodland nymph, adept at deer tracking and archery, her mother, Andy, is slowly pulled into Tom's charismatic orbit. But when the fauna of Goat's Creek begin to suddenly develop mysterious tumors, however, Tom truly becomes a madman. When he discovers his precious woods are being threatened by the wastes from a nearby nuclear power plant Tom declares open war on the enemy and Andy must choose between her life with Tom and the more sane one she left behind, if Pemberton society will take her back.

Discussion Guide

1. How does Tom's system of thous and its manifest itself in his daily life? To what extent do Hillary and Andy adopt it for themselves? Is it a practical way of living life? How might his system run into conflict with Pemberton society and the world at large?

2. Is Tom a saint, a madman, or a criminal? Is there a way of being one without the other? Does his status change through the course of the novel? What is it about Tom's 'absolutes' that attracts Andy? How do absolutes frighten her and threaten her world?

3. The men of Goat's Creek tell Andy, "we believe that you have gifts we would like to add to our arsenal, if you will." What gifts do you think they are referring to? What role does she play in the eventual cleansing of the woods? What role do the woods play in the cleansing of her life?

Author Bio

THE GIRLS OF AUGUST is Anne Rivers Siddons's 19th novel. Her previous bestselling novels include BURNT MOUNTAIN, OFF SEASON, SWEETWATER CREEK, ISLANDS, NORA NORA, LOW COUNTRY, UP ISLAND, FAULT LINES, DOWNTOWN, HILL TOWNS, COLONY, OUTER BANKS, KING'S OAK, PEACHTREE ROAD, HOMEPLACE, FOX'S EARTH, THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR and HEARTBREAK HOTEL. She is also the author of a work of nonfiction, JOHN CHANCELLOR MAKES ME CRY. She and her husband, Heyward, split their time between their home in Charleston, SC and Brooklin, ME.

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