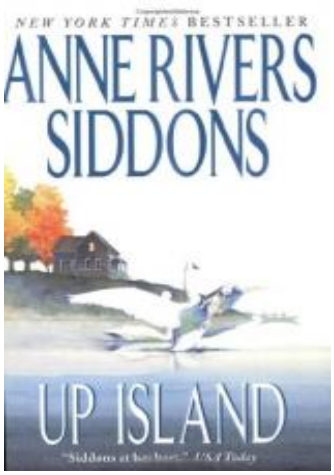
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Up Island

by Anne Rivers Siddons



About the Book

It takes a severe rash on Molly Redwine's rear end to make her realize Tee, her husband of over twenty years and the father of her two children, is having an affair. As the wife of a valued and high ranking employee of Coca-Cola, the company that dominates Atlanta's industry, Molly enjoys all of the benefits accorded to her. She has a lovely home in the high-rent district of Ansley Park, membership in the exclusive Driving Club, and key positions in all the best charities in town, and most importantly, she has her family. But when Tee announces that he plans to marry his new lover, a successful and ambitious Coca-Cola lawyer, Molly stands to lose everything. When her domineering mother suddenly dies, and her children scatter across the country, and her Atlanta crowd slowly and subtly close ranks around Tee, Molly finds herself completely adrift. Devastated by her crumbling world, she takes refuge with her friend, Livvy, on Martha's Vineyard to recuperate and come to terms with her new loss. When the summer season ends, Molly decides to stay on, and takes a cottage on a remote, up island pond. In lieu of rent, she tends a pair of cantankerous swans and delivers food to their owners, an elderly and infirm pair of cousins. Molly finds her caretaking duties extended to include Dennis, the recently arrived young cancer patient living next door, and then her own grieving father, who comes to visit for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As Molly's stay up island widens the distance between her and her old life in Atlanta, she lets go of her outworn notions of family and becomes part of a strange, but very real, new family. As the long and brutal Vineyard winter closes in, Molly braces herself for the search for renewal and the strength to forge a new life for herself.

Discussion Guide

1. What role do the swans, Charles and Di, play in the lives of each of their human caretakers? What do they represent for Luzia, Bella, Tim and Molly, respectively? And what do they give back to the humans in return for food? Why do you think Tim and Luzia are able to communicate with the swans better than anyone else? What is the significance of the fact that they are a rare breed of mute swans?

2. When Molly's mother dies, her ghost begins visiting, first Molly, and then Tim, in their dreams. What is Belle's ghost trying to say to them? What does she want? And does she get it? What does Belle's hat mean to Molly when she first arrives on Martha's Vineyard? What does the hat come to mean for Molly?

3. What kind of understanding of "family" did Molly inherit from her Mother? Did it change when Molly had a family of her own? How does her up island experience change her notions of family, and in what ways? How might her new understanding help her cope with loss and her husband's betrayal?

4. Livvy says to Molly, "that's what middle age is, one loss after another . . . Didn't anybody ever tell you?" All of the people in Molly's Vineyard "family," her father, Dennis, Bella, Luzia, and herself, suffer from one or more devastating losses. How do they each cope differently with their losses? What enables each of them to ultimately find renewal and hope?

5. Molly muses that her son Teddy was not losing his father from the divorce, "only I was losing. From the perfect skin of The Family, only I was being ejected. How could that be?" How does her separation and potential divorce from Tee irrevocably alter her relationships with her children, friends, and parents as well? How is it that only she "was losing?" And does that still hold true by the end of the novel?

6. Molly agrees to stay in the small up island cottage on the condition that she is not required to become emotionally involved with the Ponders and their mysterious quarrels and struggles. What is it that draws her into the lives of her wards? When does Dennis Ponder cease being an abstract cancer patient and become "real" in her eyes? What kind of relationship do Dennis and Molly arrive at by the end of the novel? How would you characterize it?

7. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." What is the significance of Thoreau's passage for Tim, Dennis and Molly?

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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