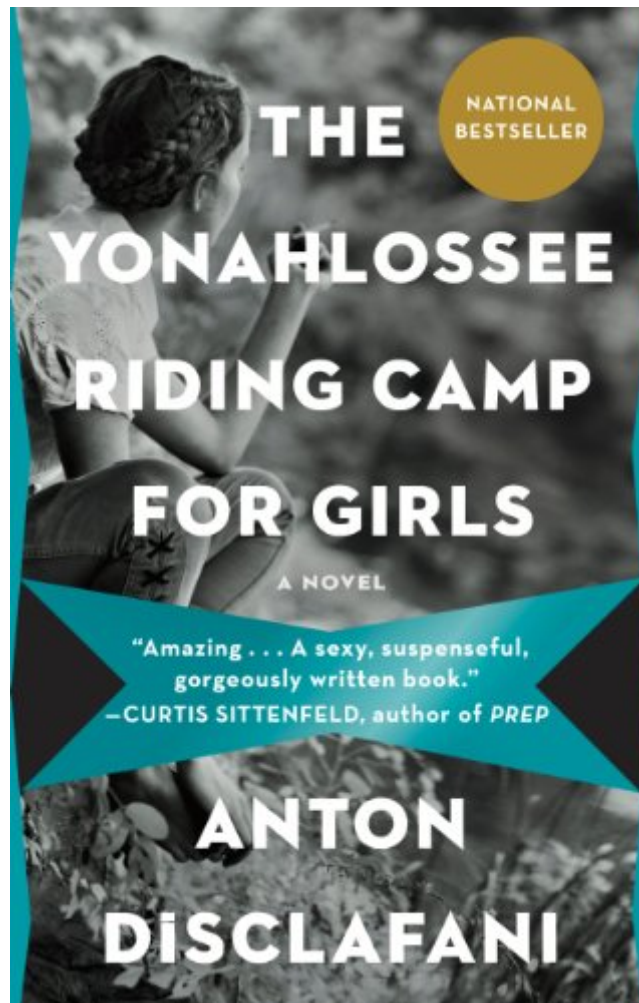


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The Yonahlossee Riding Camp For Girls



Synopsis

“This summer’s first romantic page turner.” —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*
Named a most anticipated book for Summer 2013 by *The Wall Street Journal* and *Publishers Weekly* and *USA Today*, *NPR*, and *People*’s summer reads pick.
From the author of *The After Party*, a lush, sexy, evocative debut novel of family secrets and girls’-school rituals, set in the 1930s South. It is 1930, the midst of the Great Depression. After her mysterious role in a family tragedy, passionate, strong-willed Thea Atwell, age fifteen, has been cast out of her Florida home, exiled to an equestrienne boarding school for Southern debutantes. High in the Blue Ridge Mountains, with its complex social strata ordered by money, beauty, and girls’ friendships, the Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls is a far remove from the free-roaming, dreamlike childhood Thea shared with her twin brother on their family’s citrus farm—a world now partially shattered. As Thea grapples with her responsibility for the events of the past year that led her here, she finds herself enmeshed in a new order, one that will change her sense of what is possible for herself, her family, her country. Weaving provocatively between home and school, the narrative powerfully unfurls the true story behind Thea’s expulsion from her family, but it isn’t long before the mystery of her past is rivaled by the question of how it will shape her future. Part scandalous love story, part heartbreaking family drama, *The Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls* is an immersive, transporting page-turner—a vivid, propulsive novel about sex, love, family, money, class, home, and horses, all set against the ominous threat of the Depression—and the major debut of an important new writer.

Book Information

File Size: 1476 KB

Print Length: 401 pages

Publisher: Riverhead Books; Reprint edition (June 4, 2013)

Publication Date: June 4, 2013

Sold by: Penguin Group (USA) LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00AFPVQGM

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #4,769 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #67 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States #86 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Literary Fiction > Historical #106 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Coming of Age

Customer Reviews

I loved this novel, at first - it's set in a tumultuous time (the Great Depression), in two equally rich and wondrous locations (the orange groves of central Florida and the majestic mountains of North Carolina), and it tells the gripping coming of age tale of a bold and somewhat esoteric girl named Thea Atwell (fraternal twin, accomplished equestrian, sheltered upper cruster). As the story opens Thea is being sent away to the Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls in North Carolina. She's been exiled from her Florida home for some unknown transgression, and the narrative alternates between her time at Yonahlossee and the previous year at home in Florida, slowly revealing exactly what happened to get her sent away. The story is compelling and beautifully written, but as it moved along I found Thea to be more and more unlikable and unsympathetic. She's selfish and cruel and unstable, and I had issues in particular with her weird and aggressive sexuality. There are a lot of sexual encounters, both at home and at Yonahlossee, and they're bizarrely graphic in a "hard nipples through my thin nightgown" and "his fingers inside me" sort of way. I kept rolling my eyes and wondering how this story went so far off the rails and turned into Fifty Shades of Grey. And as others have noted, Thea's sexuality is much more dysfunctional and disturbing than it is scandalous, which seems a failure on the part of the book. It's like the author wanted to write something bold and empowering but ended up with something strange and sad. So towards the end of the book I felt like it had slipped from 5 stars to maybe 2. Now that I'm finished and have taken some time to reflect on the book, I'm thinking maybe the author accomplished exactly what she meant to.

I guess I should say it quickly and get it over with. I did not love The Yonahlossee Riding Camp for Girls. I am most definitely in the minority but this certainly will not be the book of the summer for me. I should preface that I loved "Gone Girl" and "Indiscretion" and initially this book reminded me of "Prep" which I thought was outstanding. While this book effortlessly transported me to the 1930 Great Depression, for me it told a story that was hard to like. While it kept me reading, I found Thea's choices not scandalous just disturbing. Probably one of the few books I can think of where

the subject matter was so objectionable. 15 year old Thea Atwell lives a sheltered life with her mother, father and twin brother. The story takes place during the Great Depression, however, Thea's family is well off. Her father is a respected country doctor and her mother has family money. Thea spends her days outside with her beloved twin brother Sam and her horse. The only visitors to the house are her father's brother and his wife and son, Georgie. Georgie is attracted to Thea and these feelings are reciprocated with consequences. Thea is the twin to be sent away to the Yonahlossee Riding Camp For Girls. More a finishing school for wealthy girls, for the first time, Thea comes to realize that there is more to life than what can be found in the small town in central Florida where she was raised. Thea is initially incensed that she has been sent away from her family, but quickly becomes acclimated to boarding school life. She becomes best friends with Sissy, a popular girl whose friendship helps Thea to "fit in". She also has a rival at the stables in Leona, who is considered the best rider.

Take a little bit of E.M. Forster, a little bit of Chekov, some Jane Austen, *Brideshead Revisited*, 50 Shades of Grey, *Sex and the City*, and any dime-a dozen romantic fiction you can find, and mix well. Set the story in Depression-era North Carolina, add horses, and cross your fingers that the illusion will hold that you've just written a great debut novel so you don't have to pay back your advance before selling many many copies of your "work". There were so many things I didn't buy about this novel's storyline and I am stunned (and a little depressed) by the gushing reviews and the hype the book has received. One thing is certain; the writer knows about horses. That's the one thing that struck me as real. But the setting - I couldn't see it, other than the weather and glimpses of the surrounding landscape. The characters - stereotypical and romanticized, but most of all unreal. Sam is the animal loving brother with no personality beyond saving baby squirrels. Georgie the cousin is handsome and vague until the affair, when the description of his penis is the most lasting image. Thea, the narrator, seemed to me nothing but the invention of the writer; I have no idea who she is and what she wants. The musings upon "Mother and Father" and the isolated childhood of Sam and Thea - why? Why doesn't she love her parents? What is a "progressive childhood"? Disclafani writes about people who are not complex or interesting but trapped in their own personalities: Leona is always stoic and competitive and proud, Sissy sweet and a little foolish, Mary Abbott odd and insecure. Where is the conflict between the characters? More urgently: what is the main conflict, the core of this book? Good fiction is magical, it creates a reality out of words on the paper.

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