



Colony

By Anne Rivers Siddons
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"I have always written about women on their way from fragility into health, into some kind of strength."

Plot Summary

Maude Gascoigne, an impetuous and intrepid young woman from South Carolina's Low Country, feels like the ultimate outsider at Retreat, a summer playground for Maine's wealthy elite. And indeed she is. However, her passionate marriage to Peter Chambliss, an aristocratic Yankee, confers on her a place at Liberty, his ancestral home where the young men idle away the summers sailing and drinking, and the young women tend to the aging matriarchy of society women who preside over the colony. The disapproving eye of Maude's mother-in-law, Hannah, and the wagging tongues of the local ladies render Retreat more a hell than a haven for the impulsive and ungovernable Maude. Nothing she does, it appears, can escape their ruthless censure: not Maude's close friendship with Amy Potter, not her passion for preserving Maine's endangered fauna, and certainly not her intimate friendship with handyman Micah Willis, which challenges every one of Retreat's sharply defined class stratae. As

Maude becomes a wife to an increasingly absent man, a mother to Petie and Happy, her two dangerously fragile children, and grandmother to the doomed Sean and the troubled Darcy, she finds an unlikely ally in Hannah, and learns how to become just as fierce a matriarch while still holding on to her individuality. As illicit love affairs, bouts of madness, and dangerous obsession wrack her family, Maude immerses herself in the ocean of scandal that consumes this summer haven in order to save both her family and the way of life that once threatened to conquer her but ultimately becomes her salvation. **Topics for Discussion**

1. How does Maude permeate the rigid status quo of Retreat? Does she ever truly become an insider? Does her quintessential "otherness" ever help her in her journey?
2. Compare Maude's intimate friendship with Micah Willis, with her father-in-law's parallel relationship with Sarah Fowler. Do these platonic love affairs ultimately hurt or benefit their respective marriages? Do you agree with Christina Willis' assessment that such relationships can "stand side by side, but they can't mingle?" Does Maude succeed in keeping her loves unmingled?
3. Maude, who once hated Retreat and Liberty with all her heart, eventually finds herself being its only defender. What does Retreat, despite all its faults, offer Maude that no other person or place can? What does Maude sacrifice in order to keep Liberty?
4. Late in the novel, the novel's narrator shifts from Maude to her granddaughter, Darcy. What effect does this device have on you as a reader? Does your perception of Maude change after seeing her through Darcy's eyes?
5. What is the metaphoric significance of ospreys in the novel? How are osprey families similar to and different from their human counterparts in Retreat?
6. The colony of Retreat is much like a bee colony: the older women are the queen bees, and the younger women are the drones. How does a life of servitude affect the younger generation? Why is there such a high rate of madness among the young women of the colony: Happy, Darcy, and Elizabeth? Does this peculiar type of matriarchy truly confer power on its women? Who benefits from this system?
7. Micah Willis often tells Maude that she can never bridge the gap between being one of the "summer folk" and one of the "natives." Does their relationship ever traverse this boundary? Is it possible for them to surmount their class differences?