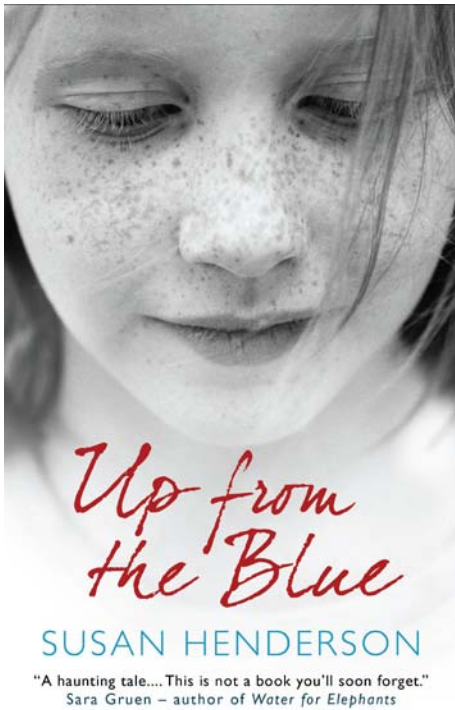




Oneworld Readers' Guide

Up From the Blue



Up From the Blue

Susan Henderson

Tillie Harris' life is in disarray – her husband is away on business, the boxes in her new home aren't unpacked, and the telephone isn't even connected yet. Though she's not due for another month, sudden labour pains force Tillie to reach out to her estranged father for help, a choice that means facing the painful memories she's been running from since she was a little girl. Memories of a childhood spent fizzing over with creative energy, dreaming and dancing and chattering beside her beautiful mother, Mara. But for Mara, life was suffocating.

Told through the eyes of a young girl desperately trying to understand her world, *Up from the Blue* untangles the year in Tillie's life that changed everything: 1975, the year her mother disappeared.

About the Author

Susan Henderson is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the founder of the literary blog LitPark. Her work has appeared in *Zoetrope: All-Story*, the *Pittsburgh Quarterly*, *North Atlantic Review*, *Opium*, amongst others.

Discussion Points

1. *Up from the Blue* features a story within a story. How does the story about the adult Tillie enrich the depiction of her as an 8-year-old?
2. The eight-year-old Tillie is introduced as a 'biter' who liked to leave a mark. What was your initial impression of her? What do you think she craved?
3. Describe the difference between how Phil and Tillie experienced the same events. Which character was more sympathetic? Does it surprise you that the same events could impact siblings so differently?
4. Do you think it's realistic that no one knew what was happening inside the Harris family's home? Why do you suppose Phil and Tillie didn't tell a neighbor or a teacher?



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5. Throughout the novel, Tillie made references to the neighbours who seemed to live such peaceful lives, but she became aware of divorce, bullying, and racism through her contact with the other children. In what way is it helpful to see Tillie's situation in the context of the larger community?
6. What did you learn about Tillie from the people she's drawn to and how close she allows herself to get to them?
7. Why do you think Mara came alive in the secret room, but hardly functioned when she lived with the rest of the family?
8. Were you surprised to learn why Mara disappeared, and were you frustrated with the characters for their actions or inactions?
9. What was the significance of the ruby cup to Tillie, and how did that change near the end of the book?
10. Mara talked about the woman in the golden gown to communicate her dreams and her regrets. Where is the line between self-fulfillment and sacrifice for others?
11. The story of the eight-year-old Tillie ended with the family walk. Did this gain significance when you read the final chapter of the book?
12. How did you find the final scene between grown Tillie and her father? What was your reaction to Tillie's statement, "I want him to be as powerful a father as he is a scientist"?
13. In the closing chapter, Tillie wonders what her mother might have become if they'd offered her help? Do you think she could have been helped?
14. What kind of mother do you think Tillie will be? What makes you feel hopeful or pessimistic about her future?

Useful Links

LitPark – www.litpark.com

Susan Henderson on *Book Notes* – <http://bit.ly/qbgVwu>

One True Thing: Susan Henderson interviewed on *Psychology Today* – <http://bit.ly/nzJ7JH>