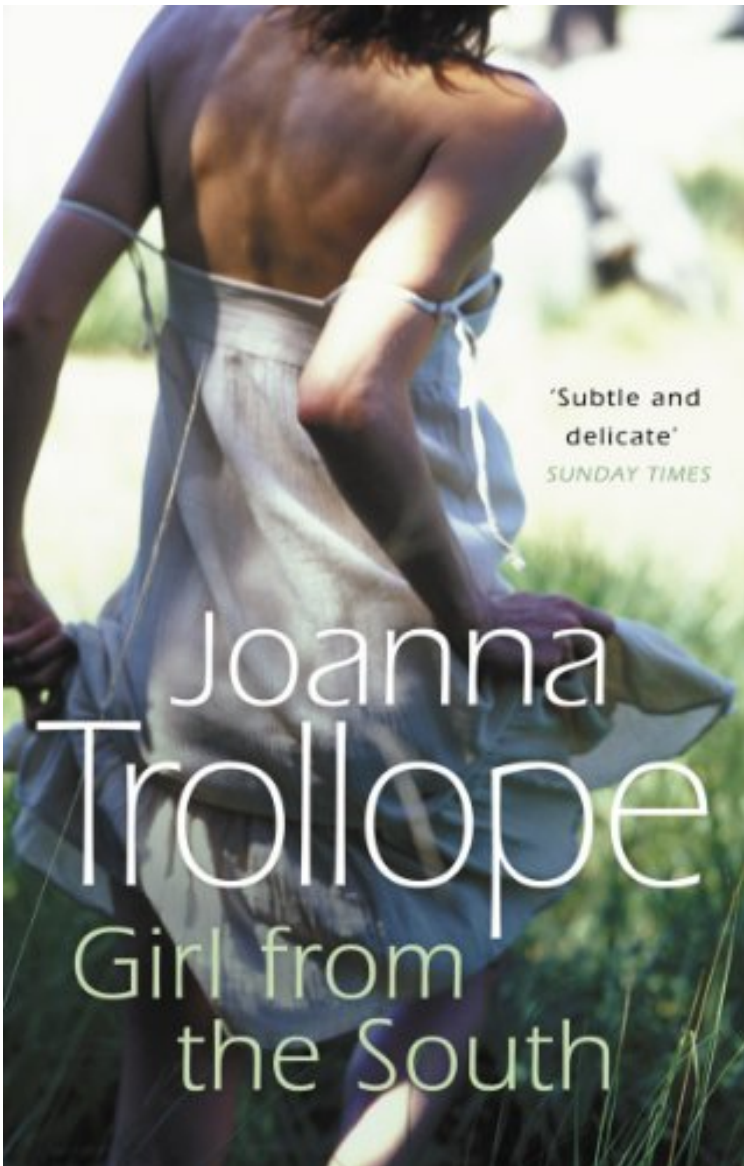


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# Girl From The South



*Par Joanna Trollope*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Gillon - red-haired, intelligent, vulnerable - comes to London to escape from the demands of her wealthy, conventional, socially superior family in Charleston, South Carolina. An art historian, she has a chance meeting with Tilly, whose long-term boyfriend Henry is a wildlife photographer who is finding it hard to commit. Before long Gillon has moved into their flat, replacing Henry's old mate William, William's on-off-girlfriend Susie, and a lots of mess and disorganisation. Things are changing, and Tilly finds it difficult to accept that her dreams of settling down with Henry are receding further into the distance, especially when Henry announces that he is going to South Carolina to photograph the abundant wildlife of the area. There, Henry is wholly seduced by the charms of Charleston, by Gillon's family, and by

the old patrician way of life which presents itself. The rules seem to be changing, the time passing by, and the future is becoming less and less certain...ExtraitChapter OneGillon lay in bed with her eyes closed. One hand was loosely bunched under her chin, the other lay outside the covers holding the remote control of the TV. She did this every morning, rearing up when the alarm went off and fumbling for the remote control and the on button, all without opening her eyes. It was a mark of defiance, a resistance against the waiting demands of the day. Yes, shed heard the alarm. Yes, she acknowledged that the outside world, so volubly present on the television, was there. But no, she wouldnt open her eyes and participate in it all. Not yet, anyway.Its a high of 68 today, the man from Stormteam was saying. Gillon knew what he looked like; a big, solid, brown-haired, unexceptionable man with a voice modulated to bring just a little edge of drama to the duller weather patterns, and reassurance to the more alarming ones. Humidity around the low 60s, 62 out at the airport, tonight maybe a low of 58, some precipitation expected later on, in these southwest windsHe would be gesturing behind him at the weather map, at the plumes of blue cloud and rain streaking up the coast from Florida through Georgia. He couldnt see the map, of course, he just had to gesture with his big, well-kept hands (so many men in public life now had well-kept hands: soon thered be gender fights for seats in nail parlours) at where he knew things were, the mountains up in North Carolina, the South Carolina low country where Charleston lay, the long, flat shoreline running up towards Washington, towards New York, towards the rocky coasts hundreds of miles north which Gillon could never in her mind disassociate from the need to hunt whales in the wild grey winter seas, months and months away from home fighting weather and water and beasts the size of apartment buildings. Gillon had, at one time, worn out two copies of Moby Dick, reading about whales. But then, she was always reading. Whole summers and Thanksgivings and Christmases had passed, in her childhood, with her just reading. Her father had despaired of her, so had her grandmother. Her grandmother had told her that if reading was all she ever did, shed never find a husband. And her grandmother was right. Here she was, at nearly thirty, lying alone in a single bed in a garret apartment in a shabby house the wrong end of Queen Street with only a television remote control for company. A husband seemed as faraway a prospect as the moon.She opened one eye. Her bed was in a corner and two sloping sections of ceiling met above it. On one there was a stain (rain probably, lashing in from the Atlantic through the neglected roof) which, with the addition of a trunk and one more leg, would have made an elephant. On the other, there was a crack. It was about fifteen inches long, and occasionally, out of the wider end, a small spider would emerge and stroll up to the apex where the roof angles met, and begin on the meticulous construction of a web. Once, when Gillon had a sore throat and a fever and had spent the morning in bed, she had watched while a whole two-inch gauze hammock had been constructed. It had given her a sense of the absolute futility of trying to perfect anything, ever, herself.At the far end of the room, a dormer window looked south into Queen Street. There was a cotton shade over the window which had become partly detached from its header leaving a triangle of sky visible. The sky was, this morning, blue. Clear, clean, strong spring blue, blue as it only was when the humidity wasnt too high, when veils of soft steaming air didnt fall over the city like pudding cloths. Hospital weather, Gillons grandmother called the summers and early falls in Charleston. She remembered air-conditioners coming in. Before that, she said, she and her brothers were sent to Marthas Vineyard for the summers. She insisted shed hated those northern exiles, longed only to get back to Charleston. Grandmama, Gillon thought, had to be the most obsessed person about Charleston in the entire history of the world.Gillon sat up. A polished girl from NBC in New York, with perfect hair and make-up and completely dead eyes, was reciting the current international stock market prices. Gillon pressed the mute button and watched for a while as the girl mouthed out at her from the screen. She could hear traffic below in the street now and the man in the apartment immediately beneath hers had turned on his washing machine. He kept it right against the wall that rose up beside Gillons bed, and, when the spin cycle started, the irregular thumping could sometimes shake a book out of Gillons hands. Shed asked him about it.Sure, he said.I mean, could you just move it, maybe, a couple of inches out?Sure, he said.But the thumping continued. Gillon sat on the edge of her bed, and watched her pillow jerk as if a small animal underneath it was having hiccups. Then she stood up and stretched. The bed bumped softly and rhythmically against her calves. She pulled her nightshirt T-shirt over her head and dropped it on the floor. It had been a gift from her sister, Ashley. It was pale grey, printed with pink hearts, and across the front it said, Dont die not knowing. Well, Ashley knew. Some things at least. Ashley was twenty-five years old and she had a husband and very nearly a chef s kitchen and belonged to the Junior League. Ashley knew, if her clothes and her hair and her manner were anything to go by, what being a woman was all about.Gillon put on the faded indigo-dyed cotton kimono shed found in a thrift shop for seven dollars, and padded out to the

shower on the landing. Nobody used the shower but her, but as it wasn't integral to the apartment, Gillon had been able to argue successfully for a considerable reduction in her rental. Reductions in everything, at the moment, were central, crucial, to Gillon's life. Daddy and Mother were always offering help, always, but Gillon wouldn't take it. Couldn't. Someone of nearly thirty who had left home as often as Gillon had could not possibly contemplate a handout. When she'd got her internship at the Pinckney Museum of Art, Daddy'd tried to make her take an allowance. No one, Gill, can live on six thousand dollars a year. Maybe I can. Not possible. Categorically, not possible. I'm going to try. No, Daddy said. He smiled at her. His smile had all the quiet, affectionate confidence of the man the male who knows best. She hadn't smiled back. Watch me, she said. She got an evening job in a bar on Market Street and a Saturday job in a lunch place on King Street. She did the Southern bit for big, pale tourists from the Midwest, persuading them to try fried oysters, put pecan butter on their sweet-potato pancakes. Her father never came near the bar, nor the lunch place, nor did her brother, Cooper. But Ashley came, occasionally with a girlfriend, never her husband and Gillon's mother Martha came, sometimes alone and sometimes with a patient from her private practice. She had a private psychiatry practice out at Mount Pleasant where she took clinics three days a week. The other two days, she worked at the Medical University of South Carolina, all the way up Ashley Avenue. It was well known in the family that Grandmama was proud of her daughter, the psychiatrist, but bewildered. There'd been terrible battles when Martha had wanted to go to graduate school in New York anything north of Virginia was anathema to Grandmama. But Martha had won. Martha had gone to New York and gained her Ph.D. and come back to Charleston and married Boone Shewell Stokes, Gillon's realtor father, whose own father Grandmama had danced with long ago at the St Cecilia's Ball. And now Martha dealt in damage, human damage, in the wounds inflicted by submission or dissidence or perceived failure. Many of her patients were women. My model prisoners, Martha called them. She'd bring some of them to the lunch place where Gillon worked and Gillon would notice you couldn't help noticing, however much you loved Mother and it was hard to do other than love her how easily the relationship with patients came to her, how comfortable she was with them, outgoing, almost demonstrative. It was a different Mother from the one at home in Gillon's childhood, Gillon's adolescence. That one was kind, certainly, but cool and distracted and always, always busy. You have to find your own way, Martha said to Gillon, over and over. No one can find it for you. Gillon turned the shower on. It sprang across the tiny tiled cell, hitting the far wall with a hiss. She dropped her robe on the landing floor she liked its being dyed with indigo: Charleston had exported barrels and barrels of indigo in its prosperous past and stepped into the water. Her image shimmered faintly on the shiny cream-tiled wall, small and pale with this mop of fairish, gingery hair, wild hair, unsleek hair, hair that rose up in humid weather to dwarf her head in a tangle of intractable curls. No one knew where that hair had come from. No Alton (Great-Grandpapa) or Cutworth (Grandmama) or Stokes (Daddy) had hair like that, hair like some mad angel. They had proper hair, manageable, smooth, biddable hair, the kind of hair that Ashley could wear well below her shoulders, shaking it with little practised movements so that it shivered into satiny place. Gillon closed her eyes and poured shampoo into her cupped palm. Asking a person what they wanted out of life, who they wanted ...  
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