



Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work

Louise A. DeSalvo

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In this amazing odyssey of two black women from the 1930s to the present, all the storytelling gifts of a brilliant Pulitzer Prize -- winning writer are abundantly displayed.

When we first meet Baby, she's one of six black children abandoned by their parents during the Depression. They are roadwalkers -- homeless wanderers across the rural South, leading a dangerous, almost enchanted life. One by one they are saved, lost, or simply disappear, until only Baby and a brother are left, living off the land -- a primitive gypsy existence hauntingly described. Finally Baby is captured -- almost like a wild animal -- by the white farm manager of an old plantation where the children have been hiding. He sends her to an orphanage in New Orleans, where she guards the rich mythic content of her wandering against the invasive kindness of the nuns by covering the walls with strange, brilliant drawings of flowers and animals.

We next see Baby decades later, through the eyes of her daughter, Nanda, who at thirty-six looks back at her own childhood. Baby and Nanda move into the middle class through Baby's eccentrically successful career -- first as a seamstress, then as a designer of dresses for rich white women. Raised a princess in the protective circle of Baby's magic, Nanda in her teens is suddenly catapulted into the white world when she is sent off to integrate a white Catholic girls' school in the East. Seeing herself as her mother saw herself -- alone in an alien place, Nanda finds an entirely different means of survival.

A rich and wonderfully fresh -- often astonishing -- evocation of the black experience in the South, seen through the lives of two fascinating women.

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