



Like A Tree Without Roots

Teresa Ann Willis

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This emotionally wrenching debut novel dissects the interior world of Jasmine Simmons, an African American teenager, whose hatred of her dark skin and kinky hair propels her on a journey of self-love and acceptance. It's the last week of school for Jasmine and her African, Haitian, Puerto Rican, Jamaican and Dominican classmates. While sitting in class, Jasmine tries to will herself invisible as her teacher reads an article about a group of Black girls who, when shown a Black doll, start screaming and scampering. The article ran in Frederick Douglass's Paper. In 1853! School is about to begin again, and Jasmine is shaken to her core as she watches a 2005 film featuring little Black girls and boys reacting with shame and rejection when presented with a Black doll, even as they openly embrace a white doll. Jasmine knows well their shame since she spent her entire childhood longing to get her skin bleached, just like her classmate, Gavin. At age eight, Jasmine began secretly straightening her hair with a hot comb since she couldn't figure out how to use the relaxer kit stashed in her mom's closet. Throughout the novel, Jasmine is tormented by the evil voice inside that constantly reminds her of her racial inferiority. But after spending time with her grandmother, and after beginning a two-year rite of passage program with other girls who share her pain of being dark-skinned in a world that privileges and prizes light skin, Jasmine begins to see herself through new eyes. At the heart of *Like A Tree Without Roots* is the story of the untreated trauma of African descended people. Their rich, improvisational yet often tragic history is woven throughout the narrative, making it an achingly gritty yet brilliantly triumphant story of affirmation and healing.

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