

## The Book of Colors

**Raymond Barfield**

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In the traditions of Toni Morrison and Flannery O'Connor, Raymond Barfield presents a gorgeous and dismaying human tapestry from the edges of Southern society. Yslea is still reeling from the death of her mother when she wanders into a local clapboard community, presided over by an aging, generous woman named Rose and charming young Jimmy, for whom ethics are often an impediment to worldly advancement.

Yslea finds herself pregnant and unwilling to return to her boarding house. At Rose's initially reluctant invitation, she stays on as the matriarch's guest and confidant. She builds a new family around her ragtag neighbors, including Layla, the sensuous woman next door whose "lovemaking is like shade" to those in need, and Layla's silent daughter, Ambrosia.

With an eye toward building a haven for her daughter, Yslea charges herself with setting down hardy roots and wringing beauty from her surroundings. She glues together fragments of a Parisian scene, rebuilds a lonely animal from the bones up, keeps an eye out for the deadly snake who hides just out of sight, and loses herself in the questions surrounding Ambrosia's Book of Colors.

When the outside world elects to concern itself with the community and its choices, only Yslea will prove able to draw new life out of the wreckage. An ethereal story of poverty and redemption that ends with a phoenix-like flourish and abounds with grace.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2015)

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