



Unsexed: Memoirs of a Prostitute's Daughter

Marina DelVecchio

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Unsexed is a brave, brilliant memoir about holistic self-reclamation after childhood abuse.

Marina DelVecchio's wrenching memoir *Unsexed* is about her unending search for love.

Its details exquisite and earthy, the book first covers DelVecchio's early childhood in Greece:

All the early recollections [are] crowded and bumping against each other, they are all fragmented images, riddled with blood and violence and sex and childhood neglect, and I had to paste them together the way one attaches puzzle pieces they found in the attic from a childhood long past.

In this setting, she dodged her mother Athanasia's violent pimp, Kristos, after her gentle father abandoned abusive Athanasia and his children. Before long, DelVecchio and her siblings were separated and sent to orphanages. DelVecchio only experienced what love and maternal nurturing felt like in the brief period when she stayed with an aunt and uncle.

In time, DelVecchio was adopted by Ann—a sophisticated New Yorker poised to be an artistic, independent mother figure. Ann was also a barrier-breaker—one of the first single women in the US who was allowed to adopt. But DelVecchio's hopes for a healthy mother-daughter relationship were disappointed: Ann renamed her after her own mother, withheld affection, and showed signs of narcissism to the extent that when DelVecchio's violin teacher assaulted her, she was too afraid to tell Ann. Instead, her fear of men persisted into her young adulthood, as she dodged their inappropriate behavior in various workplaces. It took considerable time and care for her to feel ready to let another man into her life—after which her hopes were dashed again, thanks to her husband's combination of rage and intimidation tactics, and to a decade-long dead bedroom period.

Unsexed is not a linear memoir; it jumps around in time. The effect is that of peeling an onion, layer by layer, until the center of DelVecchio's self is revealed. Traumatic thoughts repeat in the course of this narrative, reflecting the reality that trauma itself can be cyclical. Indeed, this is reflected in multiple generations of DelVecchio's biological and adopted families' pasts: her unloving adoptive mother was herself adopted; Athanasia was violated as a child, as was DelVecchio's son, Joseph, whom she notes was a "bit more like me—observing quietly, taking only when it's given, whatever the 'it' is—love, hugs, conversation, food." Such intimate, loving details about DelVecchio's children tether the searching narrative to the earth, even through its lingering evidence of PTSD. They also help move her toward her ultimate, healing realization: "Love cannot be found out there, in the arms of people who have their own demons to expel and hungers to feed ... When we are at home with our body, we have found love."

The will to survive keeps a trauma survivor going in *Unsexed*, a brave, brilliant memoir about holistic self-reclamation after childhood abuse.

DEBORAH TOBOLA (March 14, 2024)

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