



If the Creek Don't Rise

By Rita Williams

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If the Creek Don't Rise By Rita Williams

When Rita Williams was four, her mother died in a Denver boarding house. This death delivered Rita into the care of her aunt Daisy, a headstrong woman who had married the most prominent black landowner in Nebraska and spirited her sharecropping family out of the lynching South. They reinvented themselves as ranch hands and hunting guides out West. But one by one they slipped away, to death or to an easier existence elsewhere, leaving Rita as Daisy's last hope to right the racial wrongs of the past and to make good on a lifetime of thwarted ambition.

If the Creek Don't Rise tells how Rita found her way out from under this crippling legacy and, instead of becoming "a perfect credit to her race," discovered how to become herself. Set amid the harsh splendor of the Colorado Rockies, this is a gorgeous, ruthless, and unique account of the lies families live?and the moments of truth and beauty that save us.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Shortly after Williams's father ran off with another woman, carbon monoxide killed her mother in a Denver rooming house. Williams, born in the early 1950s, was only four, so her Aunt Daisy took her in. Many readers have a Daisy in the family. She reminds you to "urinate or move your bowels" before leaving home, and freely discusses buying Kotex or other intimate matters, pretending she can't imagine why you're so sensitive. Beyond her eccentricities, Daisy's attitudes on race matters are complex and often troubling; she doesn't hesitate to call her niece the N word—in scorn, not humor. Born into a Tennessee sharecropping family in the early 1900s, Daisy left Klan territory by marrying a 79-year-old Civil War veteran, who took his young bride to his western Nebraska ranch. Soon more of Daisy's family went West, but financial difficulties reduced them all to subsistence lifestyles. Still, when Daisy was raising Williams, she'd barter her own labor, washing floors for school tuition, so her niece could "Do something, goddamn it. Be somebody." And she has—Williams, who published a portion of this book in *O Magazine*, is a gifted storyteller, and her tales of Daisy are unforgettable. Photos. (May)Look for PW's upcoming q&a with Rita Williams.—Ed.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—When Williams was four years old, her mother died and she was sent to live with her Aunt Daisy, the last surviving widow of a Civil War soldier. This memoir focuses on turbulence of Williams's turbulent relationship with her aunt during the 1960s and '70s. The Daisy with whom she grew up was a manipulative, embittered woman who could never be comfortable with the white people around her. The disappointments of her own life led her to push Williams to succeed and yet begrudge those successes. The author is a gifted storyteller, and the pictures she paints of the Colorado of her youth are compelling. High school students will be fascinated by the glimpses into Perry Mansfield, the renowned summer art camp created by Charlotte Perry and Portia Mansfield. Williams spent several summers there, first as a maid with her aunt and later participating in classes. Her association with these two dynamic women helped shape a lifelong love of the performing arts and gave her a sense of her own identity that her aunt's attempts at control could not destroy.—Kim Dare, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

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From [Booklist](#)

When Williams was four years old, her mother died, leaving her to be raised by an aunt with a particular brand of racial lunacy--obsequious to whites, derisive of middle-class blacks, and determined that Williams will be a "credit to her race." Making it plain that she'd never wanted to be stuck with raising the child, Aunt Daisy is stormy, harsh, and cantankerous. But she is also quite fascinating. As a young woman, Daisy married a considerably older Civil War veteran, inherited his land and squandered it, then later joined the family in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, where blacks were scarce. The family's fortunes had dwindled from ownership of a hunting camp to near destitution. Frugal to the point of fanaticism, she saved every scrap and cleaned houses. Williams recalls memories of enduring cold winters, eating elk sandwiches, and drinking repulsive powdered milk. As a young girl, she tired of listening to stories of old adventures and longed for creature comforts. But after a turbulent adolescence, she comes to understand the depth of her aunt's love for her. *Vanessa Bush*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Leta Welter:

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Jennifer Bedard:

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