

B'witched

Victoria G. Parnham

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Covering experiences with childhood abuse in unflinching detail, B'witched is a powerful memoir.

In her rousing memoir *B'witched*, Victoria G. Parnham explores the enduring effects of childhood abuse under a controlling, unloving mother.

Sparse and unflinching, *B'witched* is made up of a series of short vignettes that follow Parnham from childhood up to the present day. Some accounts rely on the memories of Parnham's friends, acquaintances, and fellow Alcoholics Anonymous members, reflecting a belief in collectivity and the idea that childhood trauma plays a major role in people's struggles with alcohol later in life.

Parnham and her brother called their mother "the witch" due to her temperamental, controlling, and overprotective nature. Indeed, she assumed absolute control over her children's lives, managing what clothes they wore, what they ate, where they went, and whom they saw or spoke to. A paranoid hypochondriac, she also convinced the family doctor to prescribe an extensive regimen of unneeded drugs that left her unable to meet her children's needs. Meanwhile, Parnham's father worked three jobs to keep the family afloat; he did not offer his children sufficient love, either.

In later sections, Parnham describes how her early traumatic experiences led her to form codependent relationships with a series of violent men. She also developed a dependence on alcohol. The second half of the memoir covers several disastrous marriages and describes Parnham's efforts to create a safe, loving childhood for her two children. It ends up making a forceful case for parents raising children from a place of love, respect, and selflessness:

Please, please, please speak kindly to your children. They can be broken and do not deserve to be treated badly in any way, shape, or form. The damage you do takes many years to undo.

The prose is direct and pragmatic, covering Parnham's experiences in unflinching detail but with little additional commentary, mirroring Parnham's detached, distanced mental state as a survivor of abuse. However, this approach often eschews nuance and context, keeping the connections between Parnham's childhood abuse and her troubles later in life vague. Further, the book's pace is quite quick; it jumps through time with rapidity, leaving character development and emotional depth behind. Nor does the book address the ethics of presenting others' stories as one's own; whether the other individuals gave consent for their experiences to be used in this way is unclear.

B'witched is a vulnerable memoir about surviving verbal and physical abuse, alcoholism, and poverty.

BELLA MOSES (January 6, 2025)

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