

Blonde: A Novel



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著者:

出版者:

出版时间:

装帧:

isbn:9780060196073

A lush-bodied girl in the prime of her physical beauty. In an ivory georgette crepe sundress with a halter top that gathers her breasts up in soft undulating folds of the fabric. She's standing with bare legs apart on a New York subway grating. Her blond head is thrown rapturously back as an updraft lifts her full, flaring skirt, exposing white cotton panties. White cotton! The ivory-crepe sundress is floating and filmy as magic. The dress is magic. Without the dress the girl would be female meat, raw and exposed. She was an all-American girl who became a legend of unparalleled stature. She inspired the adoration of millions, and her life has beguiled generations of fans and fellow artists. The story of Norma Jeane Baker better known by her studio name "Marilyn Monroe"--has been dissected for more than three decades, but never has it been captured in a narrative as breathtaking and transforming as *Blonde*. In her most ambitious work to date, Joyce Carol Oates, one of America's most distinguished writers, reimagines the inner, poetic, and spiritual life of Norma Jeane Baker--the child, the woman, the fated celebrity--and tells the story in Norma Jeane's own voice: startling, rich, and shattering. This most intimate portrait of Norma Jeane reveals a fragile, idiosyncratically gifted young woman who makes and remakes her identity, ever managing to survive against crushing odds to become the definition of stardom. Bit by bit, she tells her own epic story of how an emblematic American

artist--perpetually conflicted and intensely driven--lost her way. Drawing on biographical and historical sources, Joyce Carol Oates evokes the distinct consciousness of the woman and the unsparing reflection of the myth, writing as she has never written before ecstatic, completely absorbed, inhabited as if by the spirit of her extraordinary subject. Rich with psychological insight and disturbing irony, this mesmerizing narrative illumines Norma Jeane's lonely childhood, wrenching adolescence, and the creation of "Marilyn Monroe." Distorted and misunderstood, the muted voice of Norma Jeane and the grand legacy of Marilyn Monroe are also a looking glass into the shadow-world of Hollywood. While paying tribute to the elusive art of acting and moviemaking, Joyce Carol Oates depicts the chilling panorama of an industry that nourishes and devours the "pure products" of America. Blonde offers astonishing--and often disturbing--portraits of the powerful men in Norma Jeane's life: the Ex-Athlete, the Playwright, the President, the Dark Prince. With fresh insights into the heart of a celebrity culture hypnotized by its own myths, Blonde is a sweeping novel about the elusive magic of a woman, the lasting legacy of a star, and the heartbreak behind the creation of the most evocative icon of the twentieth century.

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