



Voices
from the
Gaps

Sugar

by Bernice McFadden

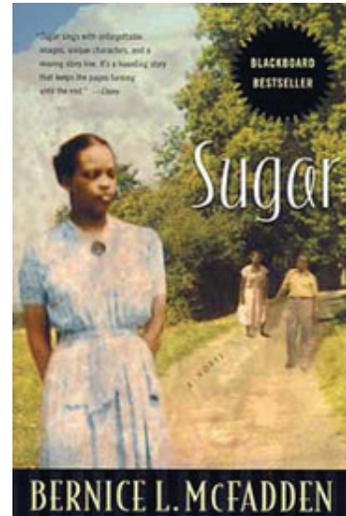
Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice

There's a little bit of hooker in every woman. A little bit of hooker and a little bit of God.

McFadden's debut novel *Sugar* portrays a realistic balance of good and evil in its characterization and its authentic thematic substance. Placed between 1940 and 1956 in the fictitious town of Bigelow, Arkansas, the small town residents are no different than your next-door neighbors. If you can relate to small town gossiping mouths belonging to close-minded, higher than thou folks, this novel will whirl you around with recognizable attributes. And if you are one of those folks, this novel will acquaint you with the undiscovered grounds of congeniality and friendship. For the remainder of you, the unfamiliar territory of a small town will become familiar to you through the charisma of the characters, and you will therefore appreciate the experience you have had.

Pearl Thomas is yearning with the pain of her murdered daughter. Her daughter Jude had been brutally murdered and "her womanhood had been sliced from her and laid to rest on the side of the road near her body." Pearl's "soul and spirit had departed our world the moment she touched the cold, bruised brow of her child. But God would keep her walking and breathing for quite a few more years to come. He had work for her to do." Pearl continued unaware that she had become so motionless in life. She continued in her way until the day Bigelow was hit by a storm.

"The storm walked into their small town on two legs in spiked, red patent leather heels. She waltzed right through the main square, blond wig bouncing to the rhythm of her walk, a leopard print pocketbook slung over one shoulder, matching suitcases in each hand. Her eyes were covered with cat's-eye-shaped, white-rimmed glasses, mirrors to her soul, unavailable for view. A Lucky Strike hung from her red-painted lips."



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The storm was named Sugar, and she moved into 10 Grove Street right next to the Thomas residence. People named Sugar the moment they laid eyes on her. “Slut. Whore. Bitch.” Pearl named her differently. She named her with love as she saw the features of her deceased daughter in Sugar’s face. She looked so much like Jude! Pearl felt an unexplainable connection to this woman and refused to believe the rumors that followed Sugar into town. Rumors of prostitution floated in and out of conversation, but Pearl wouldn’t believe them until she saw it with her own eyes.

“Something just wasn’t right about a white man on Grove Street, in a fancy car, leaving a black woman’s house in the early morning hours. It was as fowl as the raw air that was picking up potential with the morning sun.”

In spite of Sugar’s shameful career, Pearl becomes friends with her and ignores rumors of her history and lifestyle that are brought to her door day in and day out by the locals. They form a friendship that is stronger than the differences between them, and even then there is compromise in those. Pearl finds her wild side as Sugar finds her religious side. Both benefit from the lifestyle of the other, which builds not only friendship but hardship as well.

The story forms this incredible friendship between two women, yet it creates systematic problems by allowing these two to be friends. There is internal meaning in every word on the page as McFadden lures you into this relationship, just to leave you wondering, hoping, shocked and excited all at once. Plot twists and character flaws are the backbone of this novel. You will of course see that this is true, but it will be much after you have finished this book and wanted more. You will want the shock of the story to end, you will want to tell characters things they will never know--and then you will want a sequel. Bernice McFadden does an eloquent job of making you want to be in the story. . .and in the sequel.

Bernice McFadden was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and continues to reside there. She is the mother of one daughter, R’yane Azsa. She credits excellent creative writing teachers at Fordham University with teaching her the art of storytelling and giving her the encouragement to push forward. During her two years at Fordham, she concentrated on Afro-American history and literature, as well as creative writing, poetry, and journalism. Titled the “Best New Author” of the 2000 AAOWG Gold Pen Awards, Bernice McFadden claimed the year 2000 was her year. With the release of her first novel *Sugar*, critics rave about her “wit and heart.”



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After years of writing poetry for her own enjoyment, McFadden turned an unfinished poem titled “Lotta” into the two-hundred twenty-nine page, thought-provoking novel *Sugar*. McFadden has a two-book contract with Dutton Books. “Writing book two is very stressful,” she says. “You have so much attention showered upon you; on something you’ve done. The level of expectation is so high, and I’m scared” (Neblett, p 2). Her second novel, *The Warmest December*, is due this February.

Reviewed by Cayce Hagseth