



This Bitter Earth

By Bernice L. McFadden

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In **This Bitter Earth**, Sugar Lacey is on her way out of Bigelow, Arkansas, where she'd come to break with the past. With her worn leopard-print suitcase and her head held high, she walks past the prying eyes of its small-minded, cruel-hearted townsfolk, praying for the strength to keep going. She doesn't stop until she arrives at her childhood home in Short Junction. Here she learns the truth about her parentage: a terrible tale of unrequited love, of one man's enduring hatred, and of the black magic that has cursed generations of Lacey women. A powerfully realized novel that brings back the unforgettable characters from **Sugar**, McFadden's bestselling debut, **This Bitter Earth** is a testament to the ultimate triumph of the human spirit.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a heartfelt but lackluster sequel to her critically acclaimed debut, *Sugar*, McFadden follows Sugar as she attempts to heal her physical and emotional wounds. In the winter of 1955, Sugar Lacey leaves her man, the evil Lappy Clayton, in Bigelow, Ark., to return to Short Junction only 10 miles, but a world away. The Lacey sisters, who raised Sugar from birth and employed her in their house of ill repute, welcome her back and answer her questions about her parents. When all three sisters die, Sugar receives her inheritance, and would live comfortably if not for the ghosts of the past that won't leave her in peace. Finally, in 1965, she is drawn to St. Louis to seek out her old friend Mary. Appalled to discover that Mary's home has become a heroin den and her granddaughter a junkie, Sugar bravely and selflessly tries to save the young girl. This ordeal and a subsequent bus trip to Bigelow featuring a harrowing episode of racial intimidation are the best scenes in the novel as McFadden captures the horrors of drug addiction and the zeitgeist of a racist South. Unfortunately, the rest of the novel is too full of Sugar's victimization: suffering the pain of her past, she lacks much of the fiery fighting spirit that made her appealing and sympathetic in the first novel. Agent, James Vines.

(Feb.)Forecast: Bookstores should not discount a built-in audience and praise for McFadden's past work from such notables as Toni Morrison and Terry McMillan.

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From Library Journal

In this sequel, the heroine of *Sugar*, McFadden's debut best seller, learns about her past.

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From [Booklist](#)

Redemption and reunion figure prominently in McFadden's sequel to *Sugar* (2000), this time focusing on the life of the mysterious woman who came to the small town of Bigelow, Arkansas, and unleashed gossip, passions, and long-buried secrets. Having survived a near-fatal slashing, Sugar Lacey retraces her sorrowful life--back to Short Junction and the Lacey sisters who raised her in a whorehouse, back to St. Louis and Mary who helped her recover, and finally back to Bigelow to reconcile her past. But she returns with Mercy, Mary's drug-addicted granddaughter, now an orphan. The 1960s and the Vietnam War have taken their toll on the residents of Bigelow, compounding the human frailties of grief and revenge and the power of secrets. Sugar is reunited with solid Joe Taylor, emotionally fragile Pearl, angry Seth, and reticent J. J. But her tragic past also returns in the person of Lappy Clayton, who threatens to destroy the place Sugar has made for herself. To fully understand and appreciate this complex, vivid novel, be sure to read *Sugar* first. *Vanessa Bush*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jesica Demarco:

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Carol Anthony:

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Floyd Eichner:

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