



Rattlebone

Maxine Clair

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In *Rattlebone*, a "fictional" black community north of Kansas City, the smell of manure and bacon from Armour's Packing House is everywhere; Shady Maurice's roadhouse plays the latest jazz; the best eggs are sold by the Red Quanders; and gospel rules at the Strangers Rest Baptist Church.

This is the black Midwest of the 1950s, when towns could count their white folks on one hand—the years before the Civil Rights movement came along and changed everything. In perfectly cadenced vernacular, Maxine Clair speaks to us through the voices of Rattlebone's citizens: October Brown, the new schoolteacher with a camel's walk and shoulder-padded, to-the-nines dresses; Irene Wilson, naive and wise, who must grapple with her parent's failing marriage as she steps eagerly into adulthood; and Thomas Pemberton, owner of the local rooming house, an old man with a young heart.

Sparkling with lyricism, Clair's interconnected stories celebrate the natural beauty of the Midwest and the dignity and vitality of these most ordinary lives. *Rattlebone*, winner of the Heartland Prize for fiction, is a tremendous work by a supremely talented writer, now available for the first time in digital form.

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