

Salvage the Bones: A Novel

By Jesmyn Ward

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Winner of the 2011 National Book Award

A hurricane is building over the Gulf of Mexico, threatening the coastal town of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, and Esch's father is growing concerned. A hard drinker, largely absent, he doesn't show concern for much else. Esch and her three brothers are stocking food, but there isn't much to save. Lately, Esch can't keep down what food she gets; she's fourteen and pregnant. Her brother Skeetah is sneaking scraps for his prized pitbull's new litter, dying one by one in the dirt. While brothers Randall and Junior try to stake their claim in a family long on child's play and short on parenting. As the twelve days that comprise the novel's framework yield to the final day and Hurricane Katrina, the unforgettable family at the novel's heart--motherless children sacrificing for each other as they can, protecting and nurturing where love is scarce--pulls itself up to struggle for another day. A wrenching look at the lonesome, brutal, and restrictive realities of rural poverty, *Salvage the Bone* is muscled with poetry, revelatory, and real.

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Editorial Review

Review

“The first great novel about Katrina.” ?*Kate Tuttle, Boston Globe*

“[A] searing, understated, and big-hearted novel.” ?*Salon*

“*Salvage the Bones* is an intense book, with powerful, direct prose that dips into poetic metaphor . . . We are immersed in Esch's world, a world in which birth and death nestle close, where there is little safety except that which the siblings create for each other. That close-knit familial relationship is vivid and compelling, drawn with complexities and detail.” ?*Carolyn Kellogg, Los Angeles Times*

“I've just read [*Salvage the Bones*] and it'll be a long time before its magic wears off...Ward winds private passions with that menace gathering force out in the Gulf of Mexico. Without a hint of pretention, in the simple lives of these poor people living among chickens and abandoned cars, she evokes the tenacious love and desperation of classical tragedy . . . A palpable sense of desire and sorrow animates every page here . . . *Salvage the Bones* has the aura of a classic about it.” ?*Ron Charles, Washington Post*

“A timeless tale of a family that regains its humanity in the face of incalculable loss.” ?*Gina Webb, Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“Jesmyn Ward has claimed her place both as a contemporary witness of life in the rural south and as a descendant of its great originals.” ?*Nicholas Delbanco, author of Sherbrookes and Lastingness: The Art of Old Age*

“The narrator's voice sparks with beauty as it urges the reader through this moving story set in the shadow of Katrina.” ?*Zoë Triska, Huffington Post*

“Jesmyn Ward has written . . . the first Katrina-drenched fiction I'd press upon readers now.” ?*Karen R. Long, Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*

“Ward's redolent prose conjures the magic and menace of the southern landscape.” ?*Elizabeth Hoover, Dallas Morning News*

“The novel's power comes from the dread of the approaching storm and a pair of violent climaxes. The first is a dog fight, an appalling spectacle given emotional depth by Skeetah's love for the pit bull China (their bond is the strongest and most affecting in the book). When the hurricane strikes, Ms. Ward endows it, too, with attributes maternal and savage: ‘Katrina is the mother we will remember until the next mother with large merciless hands, committed to blood, comes.’” ?*Wall Street Journal*

“From its lyrical yet visceral first scene, this novel had me, and I hardly dared to put it down for fear a spell might be broken. But it never was or will be; such are the gifts of this writer.” ?*Laura Kasischke, author of In a Perfect World*

“Without a false note . . . A superbly realized work of fiction that, while Southern to the bone, transcends its region to become universal.” ?*Kirkus Reviews (starred review)*

“With her tough, tense and taut tale of one rural family's bitter and bloody fight for survival in the days

leading up to Hurricane Katrina, [Ward] has secured herself a place among such other great Southern writers as Flannery O'Connor, Harper Lee and William Faulkner. Ward's electrifying, exhilarating, edge-of-your-seat second novel, *Salvage the Bones*, takes us into the naked heart of one Southern family struggling for both survival and identity. With prose both powerful and poetic, Ward has imagined an unforgettable family." ?*CityBeat (Cincinnati)*

"Ward uses fearless, toughly lyrical language to convey this family's close-knit tenderness [and] the sheer bloody-minded difficulty of rural African American life . . . It's an eye-opening heartbreaker that ends in hope . . . You owe it to yourself to read this book." ?*Library Journal (starred review)*

"Few works of fiction can capture the heart-wrenching emotions attached to a natural disaster, and fewer still can do it in a way that seems palpable and fresh. *Salvage the Bones*, the latest by rising star Jesmyn Ward, accomplishes this feat, and then some . . . From beginning to end, Jesmyn flirts with perfection in this stunning second novel, and the reader is rewarded for it." ?*Free Lance-Star (Fredericksburg, VA)*

"A pitch-perfect account of struggle and community in the rural South . . . Though the characters in *Salvage the Bones* face down Hurricane Katrina, the story isn't really about the storm. It's about people facing challenges, and how they band together to overcome adversity." ?*BookPage*

"[*Salvage the Bones*] is uncompromising and frank, showing both beauty and violence, poverty and resilience, in a powerful and poetic voice." ?*Sun Herald (Biloxi, MS)*

About the Author

Jesmyn Ward received her M.F.A. from the University of Michigan and is currently an associate professor of creative writing at Tulane University. She is the editor of the anthology *The Fire This Time* and the author of the novels *Where the Line Bleeds* and *Salvage the Bones*, the latter of which won the 2011 National Book Award and was a finalist for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. Ward lives in DeLisle, Mississippi.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Walter Goodwin:

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