



"Strong, melodic, and honest... [Clair's] characters are lush and real.... We need stories like these to replenish us."—Terry McMillan, author of *Waiting to Exhale*

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 Details

Date : Published June 1st 1995 by Penguin Books (first published 1994)

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Author : Maxine Clair

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From Reader Review Rattlebone for online ebook

Shirleynature says

Experience the 1951 flood in Kansas City with the story "Water Seeks Its Own Level."

This small, potent collection of interconnected short stories also gives insight to a pivotal time in racial justice-- Brown v. Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court decision.

Irene 'Reenie' Wilson is the central character in most of the stories about an African American community in 1950s Kansas City, KS.

Read Clair's novel October Suite for more context on the characters.

Kathy says

Yawn.

This book is dull and unoriginal. Jamaica Kincaid did it better with *Annie John*. Sherwood Anderson did it sooner with *Winesburg Ohio*. It's one of those books that didn't need to be written. It's not awful, but it's too derivative and just not very interesting.

cati says

Loved this story! Set in KC in the late 40's the story of an African American family and their trials and triumphs!

Jane says

Excellent, very well and interestingly written. Connected short stories about growing up black in a small Kansas towns just before schools were integrated. I enjoyed the writing, the insights, the truths about the black community as it existed at that time in the South and in small towns. The author is an interesting woman - she has had three careers, one of them as a writer and teacher of writing. I highly recommend this.

Pam says

I liked this book. It was several short stories woven together. An interesting glimpse of what life was like in an all-black neighborhood in Kansas City.

Karen Davis says

Lovely set of well-crafted short stories, with inter-related characters, set in a small Black neighborhood near Kansas City in the 1950s. The stories revolve around and form a bildungsroman for Irene Wilson during her high school years in a community aware of but not yet changed by Brown v. Board of Education. Pleasurable reading--hard to put down. Clair creates a plausible, evocative literary space.

Sally says

I started it this morning, and was immediately taken with it. The writing is wonderful. The author can create a complete portrait of a family in a few well chosen words. I read, and I see a present, but also a past and a future, in one paragraph. I start so many poorly written kindle books that it is a joy to read something that delivers. Every word is carefully chosen, and just right. She became my favorite author in one paragraph.

Pat says

Well written. Stories with same characters.
Very good.

Judith says

These almost seemed at first to be unrelated stories but they are not. I thoroughly enjoyed each and every one. I love reading a story from a child's viewpoint because it brings back memories of my own childhood and memories of events that I had totally forgotten.

Brandy says

I enjoyed this story but didn't really feel there was much depth to each of the characters. I hope there is more of a story for each of the characters to tell and Maxine Clair has a chance to do this.

Sally Anne says

A solid, good, smart evocative read. Excellent storytelling.

Keri says

I read this because it is set in my hometown, in an area where my father sometimes worked. Realistic with

both sad and amusing events.

Bianca Larose says

This author makes great stories. They keep you interested, and she tells her stories well. The problem I have, with this book and others, is that her endings are rushed. It feels as if she wants to end the book but doesn't know how. As a result you end up with a wonderful story and the end is just suddenly there leaving you with questions.

Nancy says

The most interesting part of this book is that it's set in a (nearly) all-black town in the American midwest in the 1950's. I had been unaware of such towns (and I assume they're not an invention of the author), so I learned something new! The story is a story about people growing up and seeing the world with less-clouded (or more-clouded, depending on how you look at it) eyes and all the things that happen in a small town. It's an enjoyable story with multiple narrators; I'm not trying to be reductive!

Sarah Weathersby says

This book was first published in 1994, a series of interconnected stories about a fictional community near Kansas City, Missouri. Most of it centers around the Wilson family, told in the voice of Irene ("Reenie") and takes place in the 1950's around the time of the Supreme Court decision on Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

We first meet Reenie in elementary school, dealing with the dalliances of her father with her teacher, Miss October Brown. Reenie has some complex friendships with her school friends, male and female, and tries to excel as an intelligent, outspoken young lady in school where the students are all black, but some of the teachers are white.

Reenie makes friends with many of her classmates who seem to have no other friends, and it seems that much of the school activity centers around Reenie, and helps her to understand the failing marriage of her parents.

The other stories in the volume deal with other households in the Rattlebone community, where married couples manage to survive financially through good work ethic, renting out rooms in their houses, taking in ironing, or seeking day labor.

The one incident that I found really hurtful, was when Reenie won her school oratorical contest with her presentation of "The Creation," by James Weldon Johnson. When it was time to move up to the next level in the competition, her white teacher delivered the bad news that a "colored" child could not compete. Then the teacher suggested that Reenie coach one of the white girls to do the same poem. Reenie walked out, and I slammed my book.

I give it four stars.

