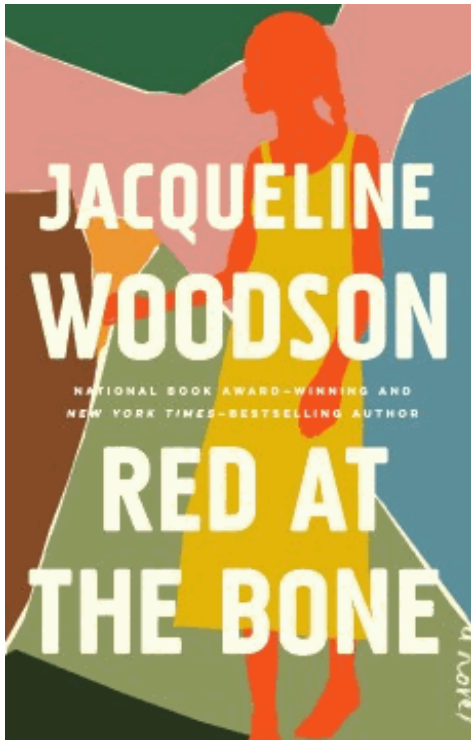


RED AT THE BONE



Young Adult

By Jacqueline Woodson

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Book Summary:

Upon celebrating her coming of age, a young woman's family members recall their past surrounding the time since the young woman was born.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; sexual nudity; profanity and derogatory terms; hate; illegal drug and alcohol use; and controversial cultural, racial, and religious commentary.

3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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2	<p>And as I descended, the music grew softer, the lyrics inside my head becoming a whisper, I knew a girl named Nikki, I guess you could say she was a sex fiend. ...I met her in a hotel lobby masturbating with a magazine.</p>
7	<p>I know you're not trying to have some kind of abstinence conversation with me. You could have. There wasn't some rush to do what you guys did. You mean have sex? Can you really not even say it? Sex, Melody. It's just a three-letter word.</p>
10	<p>Who else was there to ask who had lived through it all? From beginning to baby. First kiss to hands on a body to sex. How did you even begin it? Keep it going? Wasn't it supposed to be now that she gave me the answers. Told me everything?</p>
14	<p>I was stunned that it was true—that you could have sex with someone and that sex could make another human.</p>
27	<p>By then, though, he was high more than he wasn't and I'd never been one for any kind of drugs or drinking, which made me a bit of an outcast. ...Heroin happened to him. Heroin made your daddy king of every party we went to. ...Few months later, I was doing some research and decided to see what I could find out about him. Came across a small obit on microfiche. He'd been dead nearly a year by then. Overdose. The end.</p>
30	<p>He caught a glimpse of Malcolm's hand brushing over Melody's butt and something turned over inside of him. A new fear like a dragging bruise moving in his stomach. Were they fucking already? Not Melody. No. She would have talked to him. She would have given him something, dropped a few coins of info into his pocket. Yeah. His girl would talk to him before she did anything. Wouldn't she?</p>
31	<p>The way it feels the first time you're inside a girl. Your own skin stretching back and holding you hostage just that far on the outside of pain.</p>
38	<p>Her own fist pumping into the air as she sipped from a brown-bagged forty-ounce and danced pressing her butt back against Aubrey.</p>
39	<p>Too often she wanted to ask, And what if the married sex isn't good? Then, you're a whole other kind of fucked.</p>
40	<p>Her body felt strange. Her nipples tingled even when Aubrey wasn't touching them.</p>
42	<p>She hadn't thought she'd get pregnant. Most times, Aubrey wore a condom. When he didn't have one, he pulled out in time. Sometimes, she told him he didn't have to. She was young and hardly got her period, so whatever was down there that made it possible to have a baby wasn't even fully formed.</p>
58	<p>Then he kissed her. Again and again he kissed her.</p>
64	<p>Up in her room, they had lain on her bed kissing and rubbing against each other until Aubrey's lips burned and his body felt like it would explode from everything he wanted. They had been serious for four months, Iris hanging at the park while he shot baskets with his boys, then the two of them talking for hours on a bench in Knickerbocker Park, his hand beneath her shirt, warm on her back, her legs draped over his. ...I love you, he whispered into her ear as they lay side by side on her bed. I love you so much, Iris. Because maybe this was what love felt like—a constant ache, an endless need. He waited for Iris to tell him she loved him back, but instead, she reached inside his pants, then into his underwear, and wrapped her hand around him. He bit down hard on his bottom lip,</p>

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	<p>closed his eyes, and waited for what came next. He was terrified of what came next. He had only done this to himself. His own Vaseline hand in the bathroom, with the door locked and water running in case he cried out to the images of girls he had only seen fully clothed reimagined naked playing in his head. He had imagined Iris naked, but no matter how tightly he closed his eyes, no matter how fast he moved his hand, her body was never clear. It was as though his own imagination waxed over when he tried to see her. Lying beside her, her hand moving slowly, his fingers moving up her belly and beneath her bra, he was grateful that she felt so surprising beneath her clothes. So perfect. When he opened his eyes again, Iris was smiling, that sloe-eyed smile that scared the hell out of him and made him love her more. She pulled his pants and underwear down below his knees, and because he didn't know what else to do, he closed his eyes again and let her. Praying silently that she'd stop. Hoping she wouldn't. I love you, he said again, because if he whispered anything else, he was sure he would cry. He didn't want to cry. He wanted to laugh. No, he wanted to cry. Open your eyes and take my shirt off, she said.</p> <p>He started unbuttoning her shirt slowly. In the movies he'd seen, this was part of the love scene, the guy looking into his girlfriend's eyes as he took off her clothes. He wanted this part to last forever. He wanted everything to be slow and perfect and right. You mess around, my dad's gonna come home and find you in my room half-naked. Iris moved his hands away and quickly undid her own shirt. He didn't know what to do with his hands.</p> <p>Take your clothes off, Aubrey! You acting like you don't want this.</p> <p>He stumbled jumping off the bed, steadied himself against her dresser as he removed his pants and T-shirt. A fan whirred in the window, but the room was still hot. Other than the whirring, though, the house was quiet. He could hear his own panting as he climbed in beside her—so much excitement and fear. And then he was naked on top of her, just outside of her, and then, by some strange grace of God, he was inside of her. And that quickly, he wasn't a virgin anymore. That quickly, he had something to understand now—about how doing it felt. Painful. It hurt. Why did it hurt? But then the pain was gone. And it felt good. So good. So, so good.</p> <p>But Iris wasn't crying.</p> <p>The guys on the court said it hurt for girls the first time. They said there was some skin wall you had to break through. Like a pearly gate, they'd said. And then you in Heaven! He'd laughed with them, gave high fives as they lied about their first times. One brother went on and on about how this girl made him stop but he told her if she didn't let him finish, she'd have to walk around the neighborhood with a half-popped cherry and what kind of look was that. But they were wrong. There wasn't a skin wall, just Iris pressing up and him pressing down and the feeling like nothing he ever believed could exist on earth. His body exploding first inside of himself, then into Iris. He could feel himself shooting into her, her own body, swallowing him whole. This had to be love. It had to be.</p> <p>...He wanted to ask if he was big enough, slow enough, good enough.</p>
73	<p>Once, because he had seen it on a television show, he suggested prayer. But she didn't believe in God. Or Jesus. Or Satan. Or prayer.</p> <p>...I believe in words, she said. I believe in numbers and all the history I understand. I believe in things I can see.</p>
80	<p>Those Tulsa white folks burned my grandmama's beauty shop to the ground!</p> <p>...Those white folks tried to kill every living brown body in all of Greenwood, my own mama included. Every last one. That was 1921. History tries to call it a riot, but it was a massacre.</p>

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	<p>Those white men brought in their warplanes and dropped bombs on my mama's neighborhood.</p> <p>...Those white folks came with their torches and their rages. They circled in their cars, hollered out, called them niggers like they were calling them by their names. Turned my people's lives and dreams to ash.</p>
83	<p>All over this country people talk about a silver spoon, but truth be told, the spoon is gold. And solid. And stacked high and across. That's how you have to do if you're colored, black, Negro, brown . . . Whatever you're calling yourself that isn't white.</p>
84	<p>And when the priest calls your only child into his chambers, rests his hand too high up on her thigh, and tells her about the place in hell that is waiting for her, you return only once more—to damn him. To damn them all.</p>
102	<p>Her mother insisted he sleep in the guest room down the hall from hers until the baby came (which made zero sense to anybody and her mother knew that), but he'd tiptoe over to her room in the middle of the night and at eight, nine months pregnant, they found ways to have silent sex, the bed still more than big enough for both of them, belly and all, Aubrey's grief mixed with passion bringing a new desperation to the way he held her.</p>
106	<p>They were fascinated by her. But from a distance, snapping their heads back toward the front of the classroom when she looked up to catch them staring, clustering in the bathroom and hallways to whisper about the hows and whens of her pregnancy. I heard it was two boys at once. And that now she's got two babies in her belly.</p> <p>No, that's not it at all. I heard it was her own daddy that did it.</p> <p>You lie!</p> <p>Nope. It's true.</p> <p>I heard there's another in she house. That she had when she was just eleven years old! Impossible. It can't happen at eleven. Not to anybody.</p> <p>...But did any of them know anything? She had wanted to jump into the center of their circles, belly and all, and tell them everything. How good it felt. How it smelled. How the sweat on Aubrey's neck tasted, the pleasure screams in the back of her throat that she had to swallow. She longed to shock the hell out of them with what she knew.</p>
109	<p>I'm sure the two of you are there fooling around when he's not.</p>
120	<p>And give no damns that the white kids be looking at us like we don't even belong at that school, in their lunchroom, sticking tongs into their salad bars. Fuck no. Don't even know they're in the presence of royalty when they ask, How come you all sit together? without checking their own all-white tables.</p> <p>...I am spending my years watching white girls snatch basketball-playing brothers into hallway corners and behind the pool and the brothers letting themselves get snatched. They just want to know if the hair is as smooth below as it is on top, Leonard who doesn't play ball or get snatched tells the table. Their mamas will slap them silly if they bring those Sallys home.</p>
124	<p>They laughed at Eddie Murphy movies, and on the now too rare occasion when Iris let him make love to her, it felt like their bodies were holding on to the earth. When he kissed her, he wanted her to swallow him, wanted to be all the way inside of her—his love was deep like that.</p>
128	<p>He thought about her tongue. How soft and smooth it felt inside his mouth. He felt himself growing hard and told her. Sometimes she said things over the phone for him. Sometimes</p>

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	she'd talk in a way that made it feel like she was beside him, telling him what she was doing to him and how.
129	I'm a lapsed Catholic. And maybe that's why CathyMarie showed me the fire. She giggled and now he was sure she was high. He didn't ask, though. The thought of her there smoking weed with some dude he didn't know was too much to take in.
136	She'd missed hanging with friends, smoking weed, and dancing to the DJs spinning in Halsey Park.
155	Aubrey stared at the park bench and tried not to remember Iris with her legs draped over his, her tongue searching his mouth. He had always been too scared to ask her how she learned to kiss the way she did.
159	<p>It had never lasted into daylight this way. Mostly it was hurried and fraught—their want for each other so desperate, shirts had been left on, underwear ripped, legs cramped from standing. But for the first time, they had gotten naked, climbed under the covers of the tiny twin bed, and pressed into each other against the chill that was still in the Ohio air.</p> <p>...She traced her fingers over Jam's breasts, down her belly, and into the thick patch of black hair.</p> <p>...When she woke up again, Jam's mouth was on her breast, moving toward her nipple. Iris jolted upright. During their night of lovemaking, she'd been able to keep the girl's mouth away from her breasts, moving it instead back up to her own lips or down between her legs. Jam had smirked into the semidarkness but complied. But now, they were both looking down at her breasts in the bright daylight, milk seeping out over her belly. Iris tried to cover them with her hands, but Jam pulled them away, staring. When she looked into her eyes there were so many questions rising there.</p>
161	The slow falling in love with the way Jam's legs moved as she walked. The heat that rose inside her for Jam's hands slipping into the back pockets of her jeans. Even the jeans themselves—narrow-legged and low-slung while everyone around them seemed to be leaning toward pleated front pants rising over their navels.
162	She wasn't gay or lesbian or queer or whatever else. It was just Jam she wanted—her softness, the way she laughed. The way she lifted a cigarette to Iris's lips and held it while she pulled. Watched as she exhaled smoke, then leaned over and kissed her, her eyes always slightly hooded, like she had just gotten laid and was still thinking about it.
163	<p>The first time Jam kissed her, she was unsteady for days. It was a Saturday and they had been outside Jam's dorm smoking Drum and watching white students, huddled together in polo shirts, smoke weed and dip their heads to Boy George.</p> <p>...Earlier, they had finished their own joint, downlow passing it back and forth until all that remained was the roach burning between Iris's fingers. She had missed weed, and at Oberlin, even the lamest kids seemed to get their toke on. She thought it would be weak shit, but it wasn't. Staring at Jam's throat, Iris imagined her lips on it and laughed, blaming the weed.</p> <p>...You still high? Jam asked, eyeing her as she pushed the door shut. In the tiny room, they were standing close enough to touch, and before Iris could lie and say no, Jam was kissing her, her mouth pressing hard into Iris's, her tongue insistent and sweet. They stumbled back against the wall and kept kissing.</p> <p>I'm kissing a woman, Iris kept thinking. I'm kissing Jamison!</p> <p>She let Jamison's hands explore her body but grabbed them when they reached for her breasts. Already, she could feel them leaking into her bra.</p>

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	It's milk, she whispered now as Jam stared at her. Iris had pulled the covers up over her breasts and felt beneath them the milk seeping into her sheet.
165	She thought once she finally stopped nursing, the milk would go away, that her breasts would shrink back to some normal size and she'd move on. But the first time Jam kissed her, she felt her shirt growing damp, looked down to see the familiar dark circles, and ended up walking across campus with her books held over her chest the way she had done as a twelve-year-old—when her breasts had first started growing and a band of immature boys followed her home calling out, Hey, Nipples, show us what you growing.
166	She identified as queer, had a pierced nipple, and interrogated white professors.
169	She wanted to tell this to Jam now—that she had only slept with him maybe a dozen times since Melody was born. That she didn't love him. That if they didn't have to use words like gay and lesbian and queer and dyke, maybe they could be together.
171	<p>Now the house is quiet again, confetti vacuumed away, Iris back at her apartment in Manhattan, and the grown-ups who live here sleeping off the booze.</p> <p>Some drunk ass spilled red wine on the side of my dress and now I'm seeing it for the first time. Malcolm on my bed, smiling and high.</p> <p>...Lou was drunk as hell, Malcolm says. I can't believe that cat can't hold his liquor.</p> <p>...He was dipping into the vodka hard.</p> <p>I come over to him, give him my back so that he can undo my zipper.</p> <p>What kind of neocolonialist shit you wearing under there, girl? Try neo-Victorian. It's a corset. Something old, you know. Like a wedding but with shit that didn't really get passed down the same way.</p> <p>Malcolm laughs. Your family is bougie as all get-out. I know I've said this a million times, but damn. Today. Tonight. The whole thing. He draws exaggerated circles in the air with his hands, shaking his head. He's gay as hell, I know that. Anybody with eyes and every person under twenty-one, straight or gay, knows it. It's the grown-ups who can't fathom what they refuse to see.</p> <p>And then there was that old-ass dude from your grandma's church out there dancing with his lady and trying to roll up on my ear. Talking about meet me in the car. Like this ain't Brooklyn. Like we gonna park on some dark road. Like I want to suck his wrinkled-ass dick.</p> <p>I free my boobs from the corset and Malcolm's eyes get big.</p> <p>Those girls are like, We're free, thank you, Jesus! Come on over here.</p> <p>...Then I wrap my head and climb into bed beside Malcolm, let him put his arms around me from behind.</p> <p>He cups my breasts and sighs. In the perfect world, he says, these would be mine.</p> <p>...I want to want you so badly, he whispered.</p> <p>...You think it will ever happen for me, Malc. The sex thing.</p> <p>Shit, Melody. Hell yes and then hell yes again. You're fuckin' beautiful and . . . I mean, damn, ever since we were little kids, I wanted to be you. I wanted your hair and your butt and your lips and your eyes and now—look at your perfect-ass tits! Look at your tiny-ass waist and—he lifted one of my hands, kissed the back of it gently—I even want your perfect hands.</p> <p>White boys can't see you and the brothers just stupid, but you'll get your fuck on. Trust.</p>
174	<p>What about you, dude? What about your cherry?</p> <p>He takes a deep breath. When he speaks, he sounds tired.</p> <p>Sex is easy for a fag, girl.</p>
179	Black folks trying to be all proper and speak like white folks and all.

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189	If Aubrey had ever asked me, I would have told him there were so many before him. The first was a boy from my childhood when I was thirteen. He was pale as dust, with a perfect Afro and lashes that went on forever. I thought we were in love and we did it the first time up in his bedroom while his mother watched television one floor below. In our silence, as I gripped the pillow to keep from crying out in pain, I heard from below, The survey says . . . ! Again and again. Followed by applause. But me and the boy weren't dating. We had never called what we were doing anything. So a week later, when I saw him walking with his arm around a pretty Puerto Rican girl, I crept upstairs to my room, faked the flu, and stayed in bed for days and days. Other boys followed and I learned quickly not to love them, to love the feeling of them inside me, the taste of their mouths, the way they held me. But nothing more.
192	Once, a long time ago, to see a church production of for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf. ...Then poured a small shot of brandy, threw her head back to drink it, and slowly climbed the stairs to bed.
193	There had been the one night, only weeks after she and Aubrey first slept together, when she rounded the corner of Knickerbocker and saw him pressed against a girl she didn't know. His hands inside the girl's T-shirt, cupping her breasts in the darkness.

Profanity/Derogatory Term	Count
Ass	11
Bitch	1
Dick	1
Dyke	1
Fag/Faggot	1
Fuck	24
Nigger	1
Queer	3
Shit	8
Tit	1