



I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This

By Jacqueline Woodson

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Twelve-year-old Marie is a leader among the popular black girls in Chauncey, Ohio, a prosperous black suburb. She isn't looking for a friend when Lena Bright, a white girl, appears in school. Yet they are drawn to each other because both have lost their mothers. And they know how to keep a secret. For Lena has a secret that is terrifying, and she's desperate to protect herself and her younger sister from their father. Marie must decide whether she can help Lena by keeping her secret...or by telling it.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Two girls: one white, one black; one abused, one protected, both missing their mothers. An unlikely friendship ignites between the two, and, in sharing their differences, both of their lives are transformed. Jacqueline Woodson won a Coretta Scott King Honor for this moving, tightly written tale of friendship, racism, and loss. In a starred review, *The Horn Book* calls it a "haunting and beautifully poetic novel."

From Publishers Weekly

This sensitive yet gritty novel about incest may be Woodson's (*Between Madison and Palmetto*) strongest work to date. Marie, the eighth-grade narrator, lives in an all-black suburb of Athens, Ohio, with her father; her mother, who has inherited money from her own parents, sends arty messages from the far-flung locales she has toured since leaving the family two years ago. Ignoring the sneers of her friends--and her father's warnings--Marie befriends "whitetrash" Lena, the new girl at school. Woodson confronts sticky questions about race head-on, with the result that her observations and her characterizations are all the more trustworthy. Her approach to the incest theme is less immediate but equally convincing--Marie receives Lena's restrained confidences about being molested, at first disbelieving Lena, then torn between her desire to help her friend and her promise not to tell anyone. Lena has tried all the textbook solutions--including reporting her father to the authorities--and has learned that outside interference only brings more trouble. Marie, struggling to cope with her mother's desertion, must accept Lena's disappearance, too, when Lena and her younger sister first decide to run away and then do flee. Told in adroitly sequenced flashbacks, Woodson's novel is wrenchingly honest and, despite its sad themes, full of hope and inspiration. Ages 12-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 7 Up--This exceptional book is told from the viewpoint of Marie, a popular eighth grader in a predominantly black, middle-class school. When a poor white girl shows up mid-term, Marie finds herself drawn to Lena; both have recently lost their mothers. Despite social and familial pressures, an awkward friendship develops. Then Lena blurts out that her father is molesting her. Marie avoids her, unable to face the awfulness of what she's been told. When Lena confronts her, Marie in turn doubts that she is telling the truth, blames her friend, and then feels impotent rage. Lena shouts back, "Don't be hating me. It ain't about me!" Far from being a diatribe on child abuse, this novel explores the complex and often contradictory responses of individuals--and society--to the plight of abused children. With searing honesty, Woodson shows Lena's father for the damaged and pitiful person that he is. She raises questions for which society has no answers. By skillfully weaving together themes of abandonment, emotional maturation, and friendship across social and economic barriers, the author goes far deeper than the typical "problem novel." Lena's tragedy--her only recourse is to take her sister and run--is balanced by Marie's ability to come to terms with the loss of her mother and by her decision to tell her friend's story so that "maybe someday other girls like you and me can fly through this stupid world without being afraid." Lena's hope lies in the fact that she does break through, express her anger, and get out. While there are no easy answers for either girl, there is honesty, growth, and love in their relationship that gives young readers hope for the future.

Carolyn Poleske, Humboldt State Univ., Arcata, CA

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Users Review

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