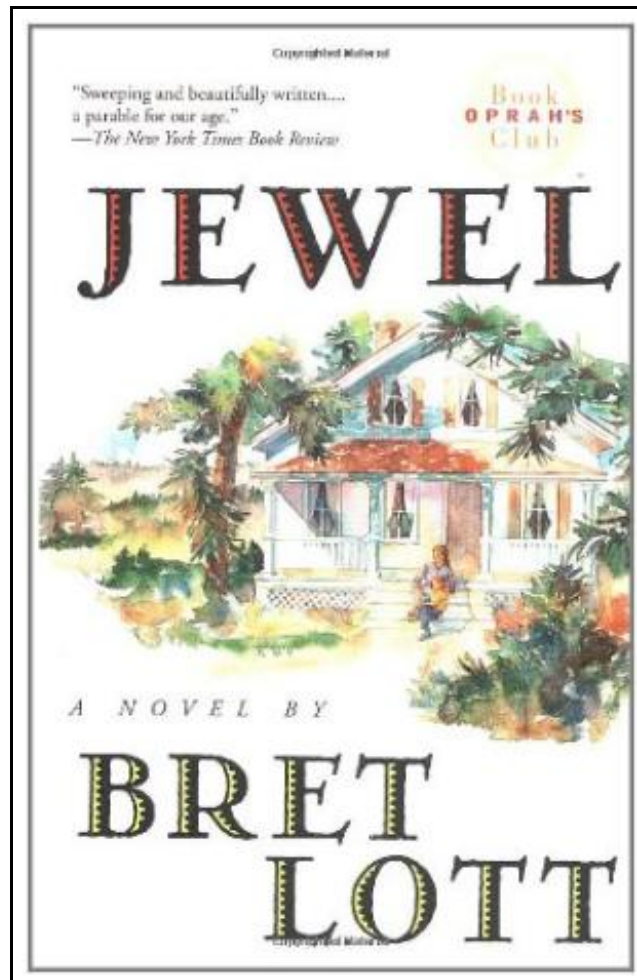


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Washington Square Press January 1999, 1999. Paper Back. Book Condition: New. Thirty-nine year-old Jewel Hilburn is already the mother of five as she quietly announces to her husband Lester that she's bearing a sixth. Their marriage is a good and loving one, though keeping food on the table in their hardscrabble backwoods home circa World War II Mississippi is a struggle. Not long after sensing the new life quicken in her, Jewel is visited by her devoutly Pentecostal black childhood friend, Cathedral. Expecting to hear a word of joy and best wishes on the coming child, she hears instead her friend reluctantly but obediently deliver an oracle: 'I come to prophesieth unto you about coming hardship you or nobody ain't ever be ready to bear. I say unto you that the baby you be carrying be yo' hardship, be you' test in this world. The Lord telling you right out. He letting you know. He smiling on you this way.' So begins the harrowing saga of Jewel's-let's put it biblically-'working out her salvation with fear and trembling.' Disregarding questions of authorial intent, Jewel could be read as a narrative theology of the mystery of human and divine synergy in the unfolding of Providence, as a powerful pro-life drama, as a lesson in the costs shared by loved ones in the pursuit of one's vocation. Like all the greatest novels, Jewel brings before us life with all its grittiest and greatest questions engaged. But whatever your reading might be, the certain intention of Bret Lott to write a true and great story, and his readers' opportunity to enfold themselves in it, have been manifestly fulfilled. 358 pp.

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