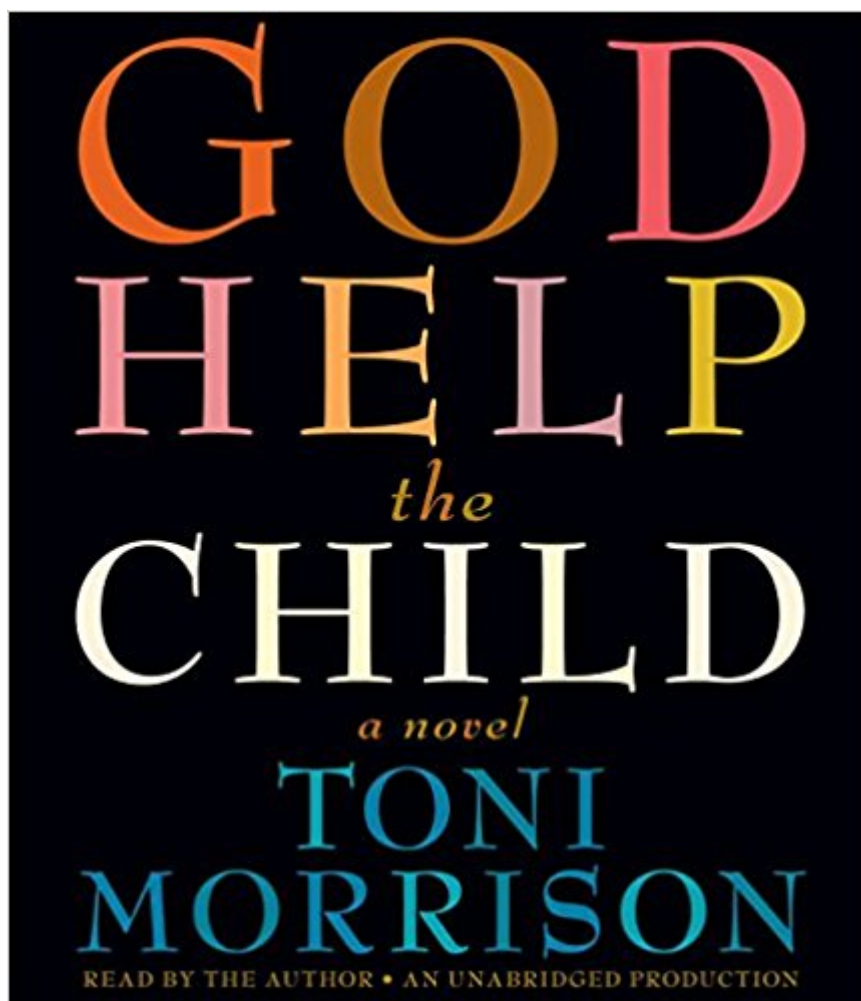


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# God Help The Child: A Novel



## Synopsis

Spare and unsparing, *God Help the Child* is the first novel by Toni Morrison to be set in our current moment—weaves a tale about the way the sufferings of childhood can shape, and misshape, the life of the adult. At the center: a young woman who calls herself Bride, whose stunning blue-black skin is only one element of her beauty, her boldness and confidence, her success in life, but which caused her light-skinned mother to deny her even the simplest forms of love. There is Booker, the man Bride loves, and loses to anger. Rain, the mysterious white child with whom she crosses paths. And finally, Bride's mother herself, Sweetness, who takes a lifetime to come to understand that "what you do to children matters. And they might never forget." A fierce and provocative novel that adds a new dimension to the matchless oeuvre of Toni Morrison.

## Book Information

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Best Sellers Rank: #1,440,222 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Books on CD > Authors, A-Z > ( M ) > Morrison, Toni #1117 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Women's Fiction > Mothers & Children #2571 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Magical Realism

## Customer Reviews

An Best Book of April 2015: "What you do to children matters." This foreboding phrase informs the latest masterful novel by Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison. The story, at its heart, is about the devastating consequences of a light-skinned mother who rejects her dark-skinned child. Bride, the daughter, goes on to become a successful cosmetics mogul, but that success doesn't translate to her personal life--Her inability to heal from childhood wounds stunts (even literally) her growth. Anyone familiar with Morrison's oeuvre knows that she isn't shy about lingering uncomfortably long in the bleakest of places, and at times

the weight of this slender book seems almost too much to bear. But where there is darkness there is light, at least in *Bride*'s case, and this contrast serves to make her attempts at reshaping her destiny that much sweeter. And that is one of the most important and empowering lessons of *God Help the Child*--that the sins of others need not define you, that what is done to children indeed matters. But how children--so vulnerable and yet so resilient--can overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles matters all the more. --Erin Kodicek --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Praise for Toni Morrison's *GOD HELP THE CHILD* --"Utterly compelling . . . Morrison remains an incredibly powerful writer who commands attention." --Roxane Gay, *The Guardian* --"God Save the Child is superb, its story gliding along the tracks of Morrison's utterly assured prose." --Charles Finch, USA Today (critic's pick) --"Morrison is such a masterful writer that even those who don't prefer stream of conscious novels may find them sucked into these minds, turning page after page of this short novel until they've finished the book in one sitting." --Sarah Hutchins, *Portland Book Review* --"Toni Morrison [is] still breaking new literary ground . . . a readable and entrancing novel that rivals her earlier work in its powerful range of effects . . . This novel is worth reading on the strength of Morrison's narrative talents alone. But it also makes an inviting introduction to her entire body of work." --"God Help the Child" finds this American legend still breaking new ground and, as always, delivering an uncompromising and memorable novel." --Jack Pender, *Waterloo Region Record* --"A wrenching tale." --Entertainment Weekly --"Morrison possesses enough generosity of spirit to see a few glimmering moments of genuine hope amid the ruin, along with the intellectual heft needed to understand their context, and the graciousness to share them with us." --Andrew Ervin, *Philadelphia Inquirer* --"The prose is lean, uncluttered. Morrison's novelistic architectures have always been exceptionally well-designed; she crafts the vessels, carefully and uniquely to each story, before pouring in the water, and *God Help the Child* is no exception." --Cleveland Plain Dealer --"[Morrison's] powers are proudly on display in *God Help the Child*. At its best, this new novel demonstrates that the author is, as she suggested recently in a *New York Times Magazine* profile, fully capable of writing novels forever." --The Atlantic --"A searing, lyrical story . . . Even Morrison's minor characters are complex, intriguing people deserving of closer inspection, and as *Bride's* journey acquires a momentum of its own, the

magnetism of her troubles pulls the reader along . . . Beautifully composed in a variety of distinct voices and covering a range of family concerns, *God Help the Child* employs a hint of magical realism and explores issues of race and women's lives familiar to fans of Morrison's fiction. The story of Bride's life and trials is sensual, both delicate and strong, poetic and heavy with sex, love and pain, exemplifying a revered author's unflinching talent.

“With *God Help the Child*, Morrison gives us an unflinching look at the wounds that adults can inflict on children with life-altering consequences . . . By the final page, *God Help the Child* reminds us that few authors can deliver exquisitely written prose as Morrison.”

—Patrik Bass, *Essence.com*

“A slim, modest work that still manages to pack an emotional wallop.”

—Boston Globe

“Another unflinching, gorgeously written story.”

—San Francisco Chronicle

“Every page contains at least one passage of breathtaking prose, a lyrical flow accentuated by stark imagery and laden with poetic contrasts.”

—Dallas Morning News

“Morrison has a Shakespearean sense of tragedy, and that gift imbues *God Help the Child*. The ending is exquisite, bringing to mind Gwendolyn Brooks' wonderful lines: Art hurts. Art urges voyages -- and it is easier to stay at home.”

—Newsday

“A book to be read twice at a minimum • the first time for the story, and the second time to savor the language, the gems of phrasing and the uncomfortable revelations about the human capacity both to love and destroy.”

—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

“Succinct but beautiful, with a powerful message that will reach readers of all demographics, because frankly, we all have things in our pasts we'd like to change. The power is not in time travel; the power is in realizing we must move on and push forward to succeed.”

—SheKnows.com

“Morrison . . . proved with *God Help the Child* that her writing is still as fresh, adventurous and vigorous as ever . . . Morrison characteristically deft temporal she fits and precisely hones language deliver literary riches galore. And which this novel is very readable, the pleasure is in working for its deeper rewards.”

—The Observer

“Like a Picasso painting telling a story in a multi-dimensional series of superimposed snapshot as each character becomes ever more rounded and complete.”

—Independent on Sunday

“Not for nothing has Morrison been garlanded with a Nobel Prize, Pulitzer and National Book Critics Circle Award. There's always a sense of grand occasion when Morrison releases a book, and with good reason: the journey is always vivid, dazzling and rich, each paragraph a mealy morsel in its own right. A highly personal and affecting tale that manages to be deftly political, *God Help the Child* is

emotionally rousing and gut-wrenching. *“True to style, the Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning Morrison uses simple yet poetic prose as she tackles timely issues in a timeless way.”*

*“Powerful . . . attests to her ability to write intensely felt chamber pieces that inhabit a twilight world between fable and realism, and to convey the desperate yearnings of her characters for safety and love and belonging . . . Writing with gathering speed and assurance as the book progresses, Ms. Morrison works her narrative magic, turning the *Ballad of Bride and Booker* into a tale that is as forceful as it is affecting, as fierce as it is resonant.”*

*“Toni Morrison is one of the gods who walk among us. A righteous, fearless teller of necessary truths . . . sensually written and commanding.”*

*“It is a beautiful thing to watch Morrison move characters through the full range of human emotion and into cathartic transformation. Here, Morrison shows us the importance of not holding on to what needs to be put down; the necessity of forgiveness, the necessity of beginning again.”*

*“Nobel laureate Morrison continues to add to her canon of eloquent, brilliantly conceived novels defining the crises and cultural shifts of our times . . . Yet another finely distilled masterpiece.”*

*“Powerful portraits in lean prose . . . The pieces all fit together seamlessly in a story about beating back the past, confronting the present, and understanding one’s worth.”*

*“Sly, savage, honest, and elegant . . . Morrison spikes elements of realism and hyperrealism with magic and mayhem, while sustaining a sexily poetic and intoxicating narrative atmosphere . . . Once again, Morrison thrillingly brings the storytelling moxie and mojo that make her, arguably, our greatest living novelist.”*

*“A chilling oracle and a lively storyteller, Nobel winner Morrison continues the work she began 45 years ago with *The Bluest Eye*.”*

*“Another dazzler from Nobel laureate Morrison.”*

*“Emotionally-wrenching . . . [Morrison’s] literary craftsmanship endures with sparse language, precise imagery, and even humor. This haunting novel displays a profound understanding of American culture and an unwavering sense of justice and forgiveness.”*

From the Hardcover edition.

I must begin by saying my introduction to this world of literature that I embrace so tightly began with

my reading of "The Bluest Eye" in 1978. I was mesmerized with Ms. Morrison's metaphors, imagery and symbolism. "God Help the Child" is no different. We are catapulted into the life of women who calls herself "Bride" and immediately we are fixated on Marxism, colorism, capitalism, socialism, mysticism and of course racism. This book carries so many messages; some obvious and others wrapped in metaphors and symbolism. The need to belong within one's own family as well as society are resounding themes throughout the book but the hidden messages are the little nuggets that can be missed if reading hurriedly or superficially. The book is less than 200 pages, the content is so strong that it reads longer and can be exhausting. Although I was somewhat disappointed with the lack of character development, and the abrupt ending, I really enjoyed "God Help the Child" and can hardly wait for U.S. G.I.R.L.S.' book club discussion on Saturday on the oceanfront in Jacksonville Beach, FL; Thank you Cee Cee for selecting this read for our meeting!!

Whether this novel, Morrison's eleventh, ranks among her previous best work is irrelevant. If judging *God Help the Child* on its own merits, it possesses qualities of a powerful book. It has complex, fascinating characters; mysterious settings and multilayered plot lines; touches of magic and irony; and, of course, it has Morrison's inimitable prose, bursting with lyricism and verve that truly distinguish her as a brilliant writer. The story follows Bride and her tumultuous relationships with both her mother, Sweetness, and the man of her dreams, Booker. The narrative alternates from each of their voices and also from the vantage points of other memorable characters along the way. In addressing child abuse, race perceptions, and violence, Morrison produces a work that delivers the same type of blistering truth and unsettling emotion that have been trademarks throughout her career. This is an intense novel about enduring love and its many obstacles; about lifelong anguish and how the past impacts the future; about what parents do to their children; about secrets, lies, and how human conscience will eventually force the truth to surface; and, ultimately, it's about compassion and forgiveness. In the end, Morrison again shows how, even when the wreckage caused from so much horror and sorrow seems insurmountable to overcome, the world forever has hope.

This newest novel by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison explores the brokenness of adults caused by their traumatic childhoods. At the heart of the novel is a love story between a woman named Bride and a man named Booker. Both have become the complicated people they are because of difficult

childhoods, and whether they end up together may be something within their adult control or it may be something preordained years ago when they were children. That distinction is what makes Morrison such a master at what she does. She creates believable suspense and also makes her readers worried about the implications for their own lives. If you are a parent, this book will make you very afraid of all the bad things that could happen to your children (that you, in fact, may be doing to them, perhaps without your awareness). At the same time, it will give you a sense of your power and obligation as a parent to make sure your children are protected. Like several of Morrison's recent books, this one is a short, searing novel that aims to hit you over the head. It is filled with not-so-subtle symbolism and obvious repetitions/resonances such that even the most unschooled will recognize the potential for answering endless essay questions. Nevertheless, this is a powerful novel that will get you thinking about a surprising number of issues, especially considering it fills less than 200 pages. Even though this may not be Morrison's masterpiece (e.g. *Beloved*), this novel is well worth your time.

Toni Morrison can write circles around almost anyone. She is as brilliant and lyrical in interviews as she is on paper. This book contains glimmers of that gorgeous prose, but I want more. It was too spare and sparse both in plot and character development. A pity, as the themes are timely and important. Lula Ann is blue-black at birth and her lighter skinned mother, Sweetness, is horrified and ashamed. Sweetness can't fully love her child. She justifies emotional withholding as necessary to toughen her child for a life of racism and abuse. I would love to read an entire book about Sweetness! Good mom or bad mom? So many possible complexities that were not fleshed out. Perhaps it was Ms. Morrison's aim to provide few details and force the reader to grapple with their own feelings and judgements. Anyway, as an adult Lula Ann works for a cosmetics company. She changes her name to Bride, wears only white, and flaunts her black skin, beauty, and success. She has a snarky white coworker with blond dreads, who is her only friend. The friend is jealous and covets Bride's job. Bride's boyfriend, Booker, is an enigma. Their relationship is shallow but the sex is great. Then he dumps her. The rest of the book goes back in time to show how both Bride and Booker were affected by child abuse and murder. No wonder these two are a mess. While not my favorite Morrison book, it was still good and I'm glad I read it. Reading this reminds me that there is more of her work to savor.

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