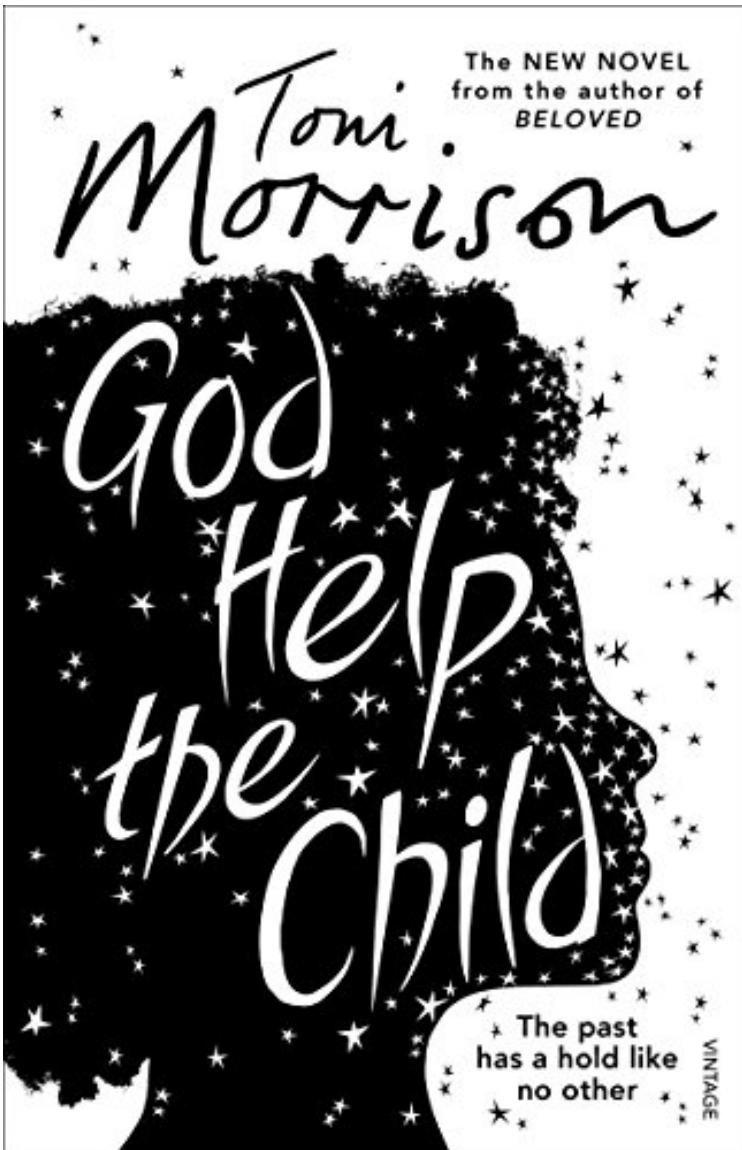


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# God Help the Child



*Par Toni Morrison*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe new novel from the author of BelovedThe past has a hold like no other...Sweetness wants to love her child, Bride, but she struggles to love her as a mother should. Bride, now glamorous, grown up, ebony-black and panther-like, wants to love her man, Booker, but she finds herself betrayed by a moment in her past, a moment borne of a desperate burn for the love of her mother. Booker cannot fathom Brides depths, with his own love-lorn past bending him out of shape. Can they find a way through the damage wrought on their blameless childhood souls, to light and happiness, free from pain? Toni Morrisons fierce and provocative new novel exposes the damage adults wreak on children, and how this echoes through the generations.ExtraitSweetnessIts not my fault. So you cant blame me. I didnt do it and

have no idea how it happened. It didnt take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black. Im light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Anns father. Aint nobody in my family anywhere near that color. Tar is the closest I can think of yet her hair dont go with the skin. Its differentstraight but curly like those naked tribes in Australia. You might think shes a throwback, but throwback to what? You shouldve seen my grandmother; she passed for white and never said another word to any one of her children. Any letter she got from my mother or my aunts she sent right back, unopened. Finally they got the message of no message and let her be. Almost all mulatto types and quadroons did that back in the dayif they had the right kind of hair, that is. Can you imagine how many white folks have Negro blood running and hiding in their veins? Guess. Twenty percent, I heard. My own mother, Lula Mae, could have passed easy, but she chose not to. She told me the price she paid for that decision. When she and my father went to the courthouse to get married there were two Bibles and they had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. The other one was for white peoples hands. The Bible! Can you beat it? My mother was housekeeper for a rich white couple. They ate every meal she cooked and insisted she scrub their backs while they sat in the tub and God knows what other intimate things they made her do, but no touching of the same Bible. Some of you probably think its a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin colorthe lighter, the betterin social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity? How else can you avoid being spit on in a drugstore, shoving elbows at the bus stop, walking in the gutter to let whites have the whole sidewalk, charged a nickel at the grocers for a paper bag thats free to white shoppers? Let alone all the name-calling. I heard about all of that and much, much more. But because of my mothers skin color, she wasnt stopped from trying on hats in the department stores or using their ladies room. And my father could try on shoes in the front part of the shoestore, not in a back room. Neither one would let themselves drink from a colored only fountain even if they were dying of thirst. I hate to say it, but from the very beginning in the maternity ward the baby, Lula Ann, embarrassed me. Her birth skin was pale like all babies, even African ones, but it changed fast. I thought I was going crazy when she turned blue-black right before my eyes. I know I went crazy for a minute because oncejust for a few secondsI held a blanket over her face and pressed. But I couldnt do that, no matter how much I wished she hadnt been born with that terrible color. I even thought of giving her away to an orphanage someplace. And I was scared to be one of those mothers who put their babies on church steps. Recently I heard about a couple in Germany, white as snow, who had a dark-skinned baby nobody could explain. Twins, I believeone white, one colored. But I dont know if its true. All I know is that for me, nursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat. I went to bottle-feeding soon as I got home. My husband, Louis, is a porter and when he got back off the rails he looked at me like I really was crazy and looked at her like she was from the planet Jupiter. He wasnt a cussing man so when he said, Goddamn! What the hell is this? I knew we were in trouble. Thats what did itwhat caused the fights between me and him. It broke our marriage to pieces. We had three good years together but when she was born he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a strangermore than that, an enemy. He never touched her. I never did convince him that I aint never, ever fooled around with another man. He was dead sure I was lying. We argued and argued till I told him her blackness must be from his own familynot mine. Thats when it got worse, so bad he just up and left and I had to look for another, cheaper place to live. I knew enough not to take her with me when I applied to landlords so I left her with a teenage cousin to babysit. I did the best I could and didnt take her outside much anyway because when I pushed her in the baby carriage, friends or strangers would lean down and peek in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning. That hurt. I could have been the babysitter if our skin colors were reversed. It was hard enough just being a colored womaneven a high-yellow onetrying to rent in a decent part of the city. Back in the nineties when Lula Ann was born, the law was against discriminating in who you could rent to, but not many landlords paid attention to it. They made up reasons to keep you out. But I got lucky with Mr. Leigh. I know he upped the rent seven dollars from what he advertised, and he has a fit if you a minute late with the money. I told her to call me Sweetness instead of Mother or Mama. It was safer. Being that black and having what I think are too-thick lips calling me Mama would confuse people. Besides, she has funny-colored eyes, crow-black with a blue tint, something witchy about them too. So it was just us two for a long while and I dont have to tell you how hard it is being an abandoned wife. I guess Louis felt a little bit bad after leaving us like that because a few months later on he found out where I moved to and started sending me money once a month, though I never asked him to and didnt go to court to get it. His fifty-dollar money orders and

my night job at the hospital got me and Lula Ann off welfare. Which was a good thing. I wish they would stop calling it welfare and go back to the word they used when my mother was a girl. Then it was called Relief. Sounds much better, like its just a short-term breather while you get yourself together. Besides, those welfare clerks are mean as spit. When finally I got work and didnt need them anymore, I was making more money than they ever did. I guess meanness filled out their skimpy paychecks, which is why they treated us like beggars. More so when they looked at Lula Ann and back at melike I was cheating or something. Things got better but I still had to be careful. Very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble. I dont care how many times she changes her name. Her color is a cross she will always carry. But its not my fault. Its not my fault. Its not my fault. Its not. BrideIm scared. Something bad is happening to me. I feel like Im melting away. I cant explain it to you but I do know when it started. It began after he said, You not the woman I want. Neither am I. I still dont know why I said that. It just popped out of my mouth. But when he heard my sassy answer he shot me a hateful look before putting on his jeans. Then he grabbed his boots and T-shirt and when I heard the door slam I wondered for a split second if he was not just ending our silly argument, but ending us, our relationship. Couldnt be. Any minute I would hear the key turn, the front door click open and close. But I didnt hear anything the whole night. Nothing at all. What? Im not exciting enough? Or pretty enough? I cant have thoughts of my own? Do things he doesnt approve of? By morning soon as I woke up I was furious. Glad he was gone because clearly he was just using me since I had money and a crotch. I was so angry, if you had seen me you would have thought I had spent those six months with him in a holding cell without arraignment or a lawyer, and suddenly the judge called the whole thing offdismissed the case or refused to hear it at all. Anyway I refused to whine, wail or accuse. He said one thing; I agreed. Fuck him. Besides, our affair wasnt all that spectacularnot even the mildly dangerous sex I used to let myself enjoy. Well, anyway it was nothing like those double-page spreads in fashion magazines, you know, couples standing half naked in surf, looking so fierce and downright mean, their sexuality like lightning and the sky going dark to show off the shine of their skin. I love those ads. But our affair didnt even measure up to any old R--B songsome tune with a beat arranged to generate fever. It wasnt even the sugary lyrics of a thirties blues song: Baby, baby, why you treat me so? I do anything you say, go anywhere you want me to go. Why I kept comparing us to magazine spreads and music I cant say, but it tickled me to settle on I Wanna Dance with Somebody. It was raining the next day. Bullet taps on the windows followed by crystal lines of water. I avoided the temptation to glance through the panes at the sidewalk beneath my condo. Besides, I knew what was out there nasty-looking palm trees lining the road, benches in that tacky little park, few if any pedestrians, a sliver of sea far beyond. I fought giving in to any wish that he was coming back. When a tiny ripple of missing him surfaced, I beat it back. Around noon I opened a bottle of Pinot Grigio and sank into the sofa, its suede and silk cushions as comfy as any arms. Almost. Because I have to admit he is one beautiful man, flawless even, except for a tiny scar on his upper lip and an ugly one on his shoulderan orange-red blob with a tail. Otherwise, head to toe, he is one gorgeous man. Im not so bad myself, so imagine how we looked as a couple. After a glass or two of the wine I was a little buzzed, and decided to call my friend Brooklyn, tell her all about it. How he hit me harder than a fist with six words: You not the woman I want. How they rattled me so I agreed with them. So stupid. But then I changed my mind about calling her. You know how it is. Nothing new. Just he walked out and I dont know why. Besides, too much was happening at the office for me to bother my best friend and colleague with gossip about another breakup. Especially now. Im regional manager now and thats like being a captain so I have to maintain the right relationship with the crew. Our company, Sylvia, Inc., is a small cosmetics business, but its beginning to blossom and make waves, finally, and shed its frumpy past. It used to be Sylph Corsets for Discriminating Women back in the forties, but changed its name and ownership to Sylvia Apparel, then to Sylvia, Inc., before going flat-out hip with six cool cosmetics lines, one of which is mine. I named it YOU, GIRL: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium. Its for girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk. And its mine, all minethe idea, the brand, the campaign. Wiggling my toes under the silk cushion I couldnt help smiling at the lipstick smile on my wineglass, thinking, How about that, Lula Ann? Did you ever believe you would grow up to be this hot, or this successful? Maybeshewas the woman he wanted. But Lula Ann Bridewell is no longer available and she was never a woman. Lula Ann was a sixteen-year-old-me who dropped that dumb countryfied name as soon as I left high school. I was Ann Bride for two years until I interviewed for a sales job at Sylvia, Inc., and, on a hunch, shortened my name to Bride, with nothing anybody needs to say before or after that one memorable syllable. Customers and reps like it, but he

ignored it. He called me baby most of the time. Hey, baby; Come on, baby. And sometimes You my girl, accent on themy. The only time he said woman was the day he split. The more white wine the more I thought good riddance. No more dallying with a mystery man with no visible means of support. An ex-felon if ever there was one, though he laughed when I teased him about how he spent his time when I was at the office: Idle? Roaming? Or meeting someone? He said his Saturday afternoon trips downtown were not reports to a probation officer or drug rehab counselor. Yet he never told me what they were. I told him every single thing about myself; he confided nothing, so I just made stuff up with TV plots: he was an informant with a new identity, a disbarred lawyer. Whatever. I didnt really care. Actually the timing of his leaving was perfect for me. With him gone out of my life and out of my apartment I could concentrate on the launch of YOU, GIRL and, equally important, keep a promise Id made to myself long before I met him we fought about it the night he said You not the woman.... According to [prisoninfo.org/paroleboard/calendar](http://prisoninfo.org/paroleboard/calendar), it was time. Id been planning this trip for a year, choosing carefully what a parolee would need: I saved up five thousand dollars in cash over the years, and bought a three-thousand-dollar Continental Airlines gift certificate. I put a promotional box of YOU, GIRL into a brand-new Louis Vuitton shopping bag, all of which could take her anywhere. Comfort her, anyway; help her forget and take the edge off bad luck, hopelessness and boredom. Well, maybe not boredom, no prison is a convent. He didnt understand why I was so set on going and the night when we quarreled about my promise, he ran off. I guess I threatened his ego by doing some Good Samaritan thing not directed at him. Selfish bastard. I paid the rent, not him, and the maid too. When we went to clubs and concerts we rode in my beautiful Jaguar or in cars I hired. I bought him beautiful shirts although he never wore them and did all the shopping. Besides, a promise is a promise, especially if its to oneself. It was when I got dressed for the drive I noticed the first peculiar thing. Every bit of my pubic hair was gone. Not gone as in shaved or waxed, but gone as in erased, as in never having been there in the first place. It scared me, so I threaded through the hair on my head to see if it was shedding, but it was as thick and slippery as it had always been. Allergy? Skin disease, maybe? It worried me but there was no time to do more than be anxious and plan to see a dermatologist. I had to be on my way to make it on time. I suppose other people might like the scenery bordering this highway but its so thick with lanes, exits, parallel roads, overpasses, cautionary signals and signs its like being forced to read a newspaper while driving. Annoying. Along with amber alerts, silver and gold ones were springing up. I stayed in the right lane and slowed down because from past drives out this way I knew the Norristown exit was easy to miss and the prison had no sign of its existence in the world for a mile beyond the exit ramp. I guess they didnt want tourists to know that some of the reclaimed desert California is famous for holds evil women. Decagon Womens Correctional Center, right outside Norristown, owned by a private company, is worshipped by the locals for the work it provides: serving visitors, guards, clerical staff, cafeteria workers, health care folks and most of all construction laborers repairing the road and fences and adding wing after wing to house the increasing flood of violent, sinful women committing bloody female crimes. Lucky for the state, crime does pay. *Revue de presse* Praise for Toni Morrisons *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 Morrisons utterly assured prose. Charles Finch, *USA Today* (critic's pick) Morrison is such a masterful writer that even those who dont prefer stream of conscious novels may find them sucked into these minds, turning page after page of this short novel until theyve finished the book in one sitting. Sarah Hutchins, *Portland Book* 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 Morrisons 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. Morrisons 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* [Morrisons] 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. Julia Jenkins *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 . . . Morrisons 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. Irish Independent True to style, the Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning Morrison uses simple yet poetic prose as she tackles timely issues in a timeless way. Big Issue in the North 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. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* Toni Morrison is one of the gods who walk among us. A righteous, fearless teller of necessary truths . . . sensually written and commanding. Elissa Schappell, *Vanity Fair*, May 2015 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. Hope Wabuke, *The Root* 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. Jane Ciabattari, *BBC* Powerful portraits in lean prose . . . The pieces all fit together seamlessly in a story about beating back the past, confronting the present, and understanding ones worth. Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal*, (starred review) 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. Lisa Shea, *ELLE Magazine* A chilling oracle and a lively storyteller, Nobel winner Morrison continues the work she began 45 years ago with *The Bluest Eye*. Kirkus (Starred ) Another dazzler from Nobel laureate Morrison. Barbara Hofferts *Fiction Picks*, *Library Journal* 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.

Publishers Weekly (Starred )