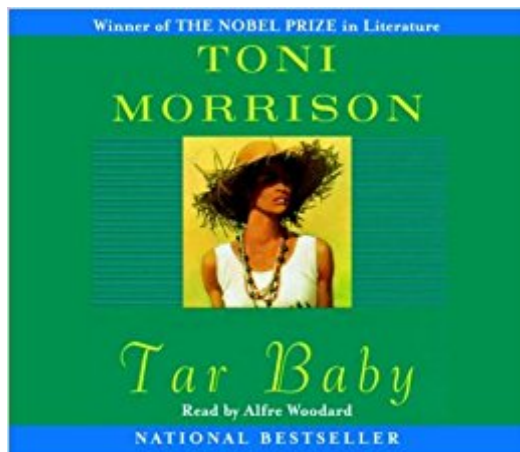


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Tar Baby



Synopsis

The author of *Song of Solomon* now sets her extraordinary novelistic powers on a striking new course. *Tar Baby*, audacious and hypnotic, is masterful in its mingling of tones--of longing and alarm, of urbanity and a primal, mythic force in which the landscape itself becomes animate, alive with a wild, dark complicity in the fates of the people whose drama unfolds. It is a novel suffused with a tense and passionate inquiry, revealing a whole spectrum of emotions underlying the relationships between black men and women, white men and women, and black and white people. The place is a Caribbean island. In their mansion overlooking the sea, the cultivated millionaire Valerian Street, now retired, and his pretty, younger wife, Margaret, go through rituals of living, as if in a trance. It is the black servant couple, who have been with the Streets for years--the fastidious butler, Sydney, and his strong yet remote wife--who have arranged every detail of existence to create a surface calm broken only by sudden bursts of verbal sparring between Valerian and his wife. And there is a visitor among them--a beautiful young black woman, Jadine, who is not only the servant's dazzling niece, but the protégée and friend of the Streets themselves; Jadine, who has been educated at the Sorbonne at Valerian's expense and is home now for a respite from her Paris world of fashion, film and art. Through a season of untroubled ease, the lives of these five move with a ritualized grace until, one night, a ragged, starving black American street man breaks into the house. And, in a single moment, with Valerian's perverse decision not to call for help but instead to invite the man to sit with them and eat, everything changes. Valerian moves toward a larger abdication. Margaret's delicate and enduring deception is shattered. The butler and his wife are forced into acknowledging their illusions. And Jadine, who at first is repelled by the intruder, finds herself moving inexorably toward him--he calls himself Son; he is a kind of black man she has dreaded since childhood; uneducated, violent, contemptuous of her privilege. As Jadine and Son come together in the loving collision they have both welcomed and feared, the novel moves outward--to the Florida backwater town Son was raised in, fled from, yet cherishes; to her sleek New York; then back to the island people and their protective and entangling legends. As the lovers strive to hold and understand each other, as they experience the awful weight of the separate worlds that have formed them--she perceiving his vision of reality and of love as inimical to her freedom, he perceiving her as the classic lure, the tar baby set out to entrap him--all the mysterious elements, all the highly charged threads of the story converge. Everything that is at risk is made clear: how the conflicts and dramas wrought by social and cultural circumstances must ultimately be played out in the realm of the heart. Once again, Toni Morrison has given us a novel of daring, fascination, and power. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

• Deeply perceptive. . . . Return[s] risk and mischief to the contemporary American novel. •
• "John Irving, The New York Times Book Review" • Toni Morrison has made herself into the D. H. Lawrence of the black psyche, transforming individuals into forces, idiosyncrasy into inevitability. •
• "New York" • Arresting images, fierce intelligence, poetic language . . . One becomes entranced by Toni Morrison's story. • • "The Washington Post" • Wrenchingly good. A terrific book. • • "The Philadelphia Inquirer" • Hypnotic, stunningly alive. • • "The San Diego Union-Tribune" • That rare commodity, a truly public novel. . . . Morrison's genius lies in her uncanny ability to immerse you totally in the world she creates. • • "Newsweek" • Powerful. . . . A stunning performance. . . . Morrison is one of the most exciting living American writers. • • "Kansas City Star" • It takes one to the sheer edge of human relationships. • • "Vogue" • Wise, beautiful, astonishing, absolutely breathtaking. • • "St. Louis Globe-Democrat" • Reminds us again that Toni Morrison is one of the finest writers in America today. • • "Louisville Courier-Journal" • Tar Baby is stupendous. Morrison is a writer of amazing skill. • • "Roanoke Times & World" • Its scope is grand and the interplay complex. But Morrison has the control of a skilled choreographer, with a careful eye pinned on pacing, suspense, grace, and frenzy. . . . She has an awesome lyric flair. • • "The Charlotte Observer" From the Trade Paperback edition.

The author of *Song of Solomon* now sets her extraordinary novelistic powers on a striking new course. *Tar Baby*, audacious and hypnotic, is masterful in its mingling of tones--of longing and

alarm, of urbanity and a primal, mythic force in which the landscape itself becomes animate, alive with a wild, dark complicity in the fates of the people whose drama unfolds. It is a novel suffused with a tense and passionate inquiry, revealing a whole spectrum of emotions underlying the relationships between black men and women, white men and women, and black and white people. The place is a Caribbean island. In their mansion overlooking the sea, the cultivated millionaire Valerian Street, now retired, and his pretty, younger wife, Margaret, go through rituals of living, as if in a trance. It is the black servant couple, who have been with the Streets for years--the fastidious butler, Sydney, and his strong yet remote wife--who have arranged every detail of existence to create a surface calm broken only by sudden bursts of verbal sparring between Valerian and his wife. And there is a visitor among them--a beautiful young black woman, Jadine, who is not only the servant's dazzling niece, but the protégée and friend of the Streets themselves; Jadine, who has been educated at the Sorbonne at Valerian's expense and is home now for a respite from her Paris world of fashion, film and art. Through a season of untroubled ease, the lives of these five move with a ritualized grace until, one night, a ragged, starving black American street man breaks into the house. And, in a single moment, with Valerian's perverse decision not to call for help but instead to invite the man to sit with them and eat, everything changes. Valerian moves toward a larger abdication. Margaret's delicate and enduring deception is shattered. The butler and his wife are forced into acknowledging their illusions. And Jadine, who at first is repelled by the intruder, finds herself moving inexorably toward him--he calls himself Son; he is a kind of black man she has dreaded since childhood; uneducated, violent, contemptuous of her privilege. As Jadine and Son come together in the loving collision they have both welcomed and feared, the novel moves outward--to the Florida backwater town Son was raised in, fled from, yet cherishes; to her sleek New York; then back to the island people and their protective and entangling legends. As the lovers strive to hold and understand each other, as they experience the awful weight of the separate worlds that have formed them--she perceiving his vision of reality and of love as inimical to her freedom, he perceiving her as the classic lure, the tar baby set out to entrap him--all the mysterious elements, all the highly charged threads of the story converge. Everything that is at risk is made clear: how the conflicts and dramas wrought by social and cultural circumstances must ultimately be played out in the realm of the heart. Once again, Toni Morrison has given us a novel of daring, fascination, and power. From the Hardcover edition.

Once again, Toni Morrison has done it again! She has managed to craft a story that is beautifully encompassed by a world full of many of the same issues we face today. The moment a story is able

to transcend the time period in which it is centered and / or written and still apply in even today's most recent happenings, is a moment in which a story should be considered a literary classic in my opinion. And this book, like so many of Toni Morrison's earlier works, truly finds a place on my own personal classic bookshelf. Then, again, Toni Morrison truly does no wrong in my eyes.

I'm an audio book junkie because I spend a lot of time in my car and it makes my trips much nicer. I love Toni Morrison and have read/listened to just about everything she's ever written. I thought I had read *Tar Baby* a long time ago and was willing to listen to it again. I had not. This was one I'd missed. You should not. It's a great story told in Ms. Morrison's poetic style. It doesn't contain quite as many "spiritual" metaphors or characters, but it is insightful, and provokes thoughts about how our environment, how others see us, effects who we are and what we think of ourselves, and of course, the internal struggle that results. The reader is excellent. Ms. Morrison often reads her work, but sometimes I find her sultry voice difficult to hear and must listen to passages twice to make sure I heard them correctly. Not so with this work. Highly recommend it.

Toni Morrison is renowned for her beautiful use of language, and I love that about her, but sometimes it can go on forever (which, if you've read her interviews, she is well aware of), but other than that, this book is a must read. She effectively addresses issues within the African-American community that often go overlooked: the cultural differences within the race and the balancing act of "being black" and remembering where you came from, while trying to "make it", or become someone of value in a white world. The two main characters, Son and Jadine, are representative of both these opposing views. How can two people who love each other work past their opposing views on who they think they should be? The ending is not what one would expect from a novel that is considered a "romance", but the purpose of the ending is powerful. Go to YouTube and find her interview with Bill Moyers. She talks briefly about it there. Interactions between the classes, (those who serve and those who are served) and the loyalty that is owed to a servant who has been faithful to his or her employer are also a major point in this novel. The plot line with Valerian and Margret wasn't as compelling for me until the end when the answer of Michael's issue with his family is revealed. As always with Toni Morrison, you can't read words simply for what they are. Look deeper, and once you have, look deeper, still. If you're not willing to put in that effort, don't bother reading it. I only got through it on my second attempt, then read it in two days. The first time I had to put it down and read another one of her books because I wasn't ready to commit, but I'm glad I eventually did.

Morrison is such a masterful author. Her novels always have a force behind it that draws the reader in and makes sure that you understand the various points of view. We first see Valerian's point of view, and we agree with him. Then we see Margaret's point of view and we agree with her also, although Valerian and Margaret are arguing with each other. This is how Morrison brings a story to life, using recursive narration to move forward and back in time regardless of the time period that the novel is currently in. One minute we are looking at Valerian and his past, the next we are looking at Margaret until it catches up to the present storyline and then advances further, which allows us to understand how and why each character acts the way that they do. Simply masterful. What is even more masterful is Morrison's ability to articulate the struggle between races, but more importantly the struggle that black people go through. Should one embrace their past and their culture as Son does, even though it means living in squalor and primitive ways? Or should one educate themselves and try to make their lives better as Jadine does? The struggle is huge, and this is what adds the powerful flavor to the story. Ultimately, it is the side of Jadine that wins over, I believe, the side that no longer blames the white man and "his" culture, but rather embraces her culture and attempts to further herself, as a black woman, rather than let the past weigh her down and prevent her from bettering herself. A poignant novel, of which I would expect nothing less from Morrison. A definite recommend, not only the book but any of her books. 5 stars.

It is Toni Morrison what more do I have to say? And that is what I have to say about all her books. She is perhaps the Supreme Novelist of her generation.

Purchased this book again to have it on my Kindle. I have read the story at least three times. Ms. Morrison can be a little difficult to follow.....I think that is what I like about her work. I can read the books more than once and interpret it differently each time.

Tar Baby by Toni Morrison was one of the most thought provoking novels I have ever read. It captured my imagination and took me on an amazing journey into the lives of the characters. Easily five stars.

Toni Morrison does it everytime!

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