



A Mercy

By Toni Morrison

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A Mercy By Toni Morrison

National Bestseller

One of *The New York Times* 10 Best Books of the Year

In the 1680s the slave trade in the Americas is still in its infancy. Jacob Vaark is an Anglo-Dutch trader and adventurer, with a small holding in the harsh North. Despite his distaste for dealing in “flesh,” he takes a small slave girl in part payment for a bad debt from a plantation owner in Catholic Maryland. This is Florens, who can read and write and might be useful on his farm. Rejected by her mother, Florens looks for love, first from Lina, an older servant woman at her new master’s house, and later from the handsome blacksmith, an African, never enslaved, who comes riding into their lives.

A Mercy reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery. But at its heart, like *Beloved*, it is the ambivalent, disturbing story of a mother and a daughter—a mother who casts off her daughter in order to save her, and a daughter who may never exorcise that abandonment.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Nobel laureate Morrison returns more explicitly to the net of pain cast by slavery, a theme she detailed so memorably in *Beloved*. Set at the close of the 17th century, the book details America's untoward foundation: dominion over Native Americans, indentured workers, women and slaves. A slave at a plantation in Maryland offers up her daughter, Florens, to a relatively humane Northern farmer, Jacob, as debt payment from their owner. The ripples of this choice spread to the inhabitants of Jacob's farm, populated by women with intersecting and conflicting desires. Jacob's wife, Rebekka, struggles with her faith as she loses one child after another to the harsh New World. A Native servant, Lina, survivor of a smallpox outbreak, craves Florens's love to replace the family taken from her, and distrusts the other servant, a peculiar girl named Sorrow. When Jacob falls ill, all these women are threatened. Morrison's lyricism infuses the shifting voices of her characters as they describe a brutal society being forged in the wilderness. Morrison's unflinching narrative is all the more powerful for its relative brevity; it takes hold of the reader and doesn't let go until the wrenching final-page crescendo. (Nov.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Several reviewers ranked *A Mercy* near the top of Toni Morrison's catalogue—an impressive feat. Given the subject of slavery, comparisons with *Beloved* are inevitable; critics tended to think of *A Mercy* as a more compact companion piece to that work. Many reviewers also noted that *A Mercy* is more accessible than Morrison's other novels that were written since she won the Nobel Prize, showing that the award does not, in fact, curse its recipients with literary decline. But a few reviewers also noted the inevitable deference given to an author like Morrison. Some sections of *A Mercy* may seem obscure, they suggested, but that obscurity simply indicates that those sections deserve another read. The reviewer from the *Dallas Morning News* summed it up nicely: this novel is more accessible than Morrison's recent work, and is all the better for it. But there is still plenty of allusion and poetry so that you won't forget who you're reading—or why there may be a few passages that you're rereading.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In its first pages, Morrison's latest novel seems to be a retread of the author's old themes, settings, and narrative voice; however, it quickly achieves its own brilliant identity. The time is the late 1600s, when what will become the U.S. remains a chain of colonies along the Atlantic coast. Not only does slavery still exist, it is a thriving industry that translates into plenty of business for lots of people. These factors coalesce to provide the atmosphere and plot points for Morrison's riveting, even poetic, new novel. She has shown a partiality for the "chorus" method of storytelling, wherein a group of individuals who are involved in a single event or incident tell their versions of what happened, the individual voices maintaining their distinctiveness while their personal tales overlap each other with a layering effect that gives Morrison's prose its resonance and deep sheen of enameling. Here the voices belong to the women associated with Virginia planter Jacob Vaark, who has quickly risen from "ratty orphan" to a man of means; these women include the long-suffering Rebekka, his wife; Lina and Sorrow, slave women with unique perspectives on the events taking place on Vaark's plantation; and Florens, a slave girl whom Vaark accepts as partial payment on a debt and whose separation from her mother is the pivotal event around which Morrison weaves her short but deeply involving story. A fitting companion to her highly regarded *Beloved*. --Brad Hooper

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Judith Lea:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or even read a book titled A Mercy? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have other opinion?

Novella Tinch:

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