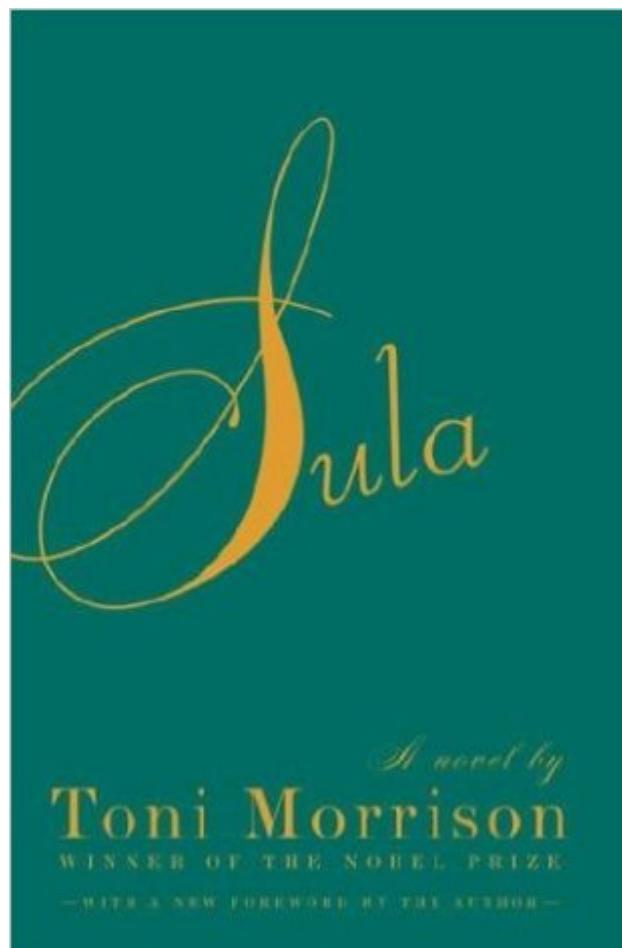


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Sula



Synopsis

Two girls who grow up to become women. Two friends who become something worse than enemies. In this brilliantly imagined novel, Toni Morrison tells the story of Nel Wright and Sula Peace, who meet as children in the small town of Medallion, Ohio. Their devotion is fierce enough to withstand bullies and the burden of a dreadful secret. It endures even after Nel has grown up to be a pillar of the black community and Sula has become a pariah. But their friendship ends in an unforgivable betrayalâ "or does it end? Terrifying, comic, ribald and tragic, *Sula* is a work that overflows with life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think Toni Morrison is America's greatest living author. Perhaps she is the greatest living woman author. Surely she is in the top three. Although "Sula" isn't my favorite Morrison work, I think it is one of Morrison's most complicated and one of her richest. Those who read Morrison must remember she is a classicist and approach her as such. Not to do so only creates needless problems for the reader and Morrison can be difficult to read, though always enjoyable and always superb. On its surface, "Sula" is the story of two black women who remain lifelong friends despite their obvious differences and the different way in which each pursues her life. Set in an Ohio community called, The Bottom, "Sula" follows these two women, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, from childhood to marriage to old age to death. Nel is the conformist in this oddly matched pair. She marries and raises a family in the place of her birth. Outwardly, at least, she seems to need no more than husband and children and community to make her happy. She adapts. Sula, on the other hand, is a far different

story. Sula is a woman who feels the need to escape, to break free of whatever binds her. And, if her breaking free involves pain...for herself or for others, then so be it. She moves from The Bottom, goes to college and becomes the epitome of everything that Nel is not...in short, Sula becomes a warden seductress. For Sula, hell is stability; for Nel, hell is change. Is either woman happy with her choices in life? No, not entirely, and we do find echoes of Nel in Sula and echoes of Sula in Nel. Though it's not obvious at first glance, the women are really two sides of the same coin. One came up "heads," the other, "tails."

"Sula" is a peculiar and haunting novel exploring the lives of several women who live in the Bottom, a black neighborhood on top of a hill in Ohio. Spanning the years 1919 to 1965, Morrison's book stitches together snippets of episodes and pieces of relationships. Because of its focus on character and community, the book's plot is difficult to summarize without oversimplification and, despite its brevity, the novel weaves many themes into its patchwork: motherhood, the tyranny of traditionalism, racism, the paradox of gentrification, and more. The most obvious of Morrison's subjects, however, is her examination of the lives of black women in a society controlled by whites and by men. "Sula" is, above all, a study of contrasts, exploring the lives of three disparate women. The Old Testament version is represented by Eva Peace, an iron-willed woman who goes to biblical extremes to protect and control her children; she is so defined by her household that she never even leaves it. Not content with the company of her immediate family, she adopts stray children and takes in boarders to fill the rooms of her constantly expanding residence. Set below Eva's expansive and commanding view of matriarchy is Nel, who embodies more traditional ideals about marriage and maternity, faith and subservience; she is the daughter, wife, mother who willingly capitulates to the demands of social convention. Nel's life will be much like the life of her mother: defined by husband and children. One of the more touching and oddly resonant moments occurs during Nel's wedding in her mother's home. The guests are spilling their drinks on the carpet and "the children are wrapping themselves into the curtains."

In this novel, Toni Morrison's deals in part with the concept of community in a town called the Bottom. Using the Bottom as a microcosm, Morrison introduces us to a series of characters, which although Black, can very well make up any other community regardless of their ethnicity or background. Morrison's ironic style reminds us the Latin American Magic Realism writers from the 1960s, that populated our imaginations with unforgettable towns with fictitious characters very much grounded in reality in order to give us a glimpse at issues of social and economic injustice. The

name of the town itself - the Bottom - is an irony: The Bottom is situated at the top of a mountain. It was given to its black founder by his slave-owner master claiming that it was the best piece of land around because it was at the Bottom of Heaven. The white slave owner is the representation of what white colonialism has done for centuries, especially in the American Continent: trading useless trinkets for good land or gold. While Blacks were pushed up to the dry, arid barren lands of the Bottom, the whites settled in the good fertile lands of the valley in the town called Medallion. Morrison shows the segregation of whites and blacks which has been a perpetual issue in the history of the United States. The Bottom could have been a new Liberia. Morrison could have chosen to create a utopia for those who because of racial segregation would bind together and carry out a social experiment. Yet, she chooses to turn it into a microcosms of individuals who, as a community, live their lives on the margins of mainstream white society - outside the mainstream of Medallion. Like Marquez's Macondo or Rulfo's Comala, the Bottom has its share of self-righteous individuals like Helene Wright and her churchgoing neighbors.

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