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Bastard Out Of Carolina: A Novel



Synopsis

The modern literary classic that has been compared to *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Catcher in the Rye*. "As close to flawless as any reader could ask for."-The New York Times Book Review

The publication of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* was a landmark event. The novel's profound portrait of family dynamics in the rural South won the author a National Book Award nomination and launched her into the literary spotlight. Critics have likened Allison to William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Harper Lee, naming her the first writer of her generation to dramatize the lives and language of poor whites in the South. Since its appearance, the novel has inspired an award-winning film and has been banned from libraries and classrooms, championed by fans, and defended by critics.

Greenville County, South Carolina, is a wild, lush place that is home to the Boatwright family-a tight-knit clan of rough-hewn, hard-drinking men who shoot up each other's trucks, and indomitable women who get married young and age too quickly. At the heart of this story is Ruth Anne Boatwright, known simply as Bone, a bastard child who observes the world around her with a mercilessly keen perspective. When her stepfather Daddy Glen, "cold as death, mean as a snake," becomes increasingly more vicious toward her, Bone finds herself caught in a family triangle that tests the loyalty of her mother, Anney-and leads to a final, harrowing encounter from which there can be no turning back.

Now available in a twentieth anniversary keepsake edition with a new afterword by the author.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I read this book as part of a college literature assignment. *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a well-written,

deeply moving, and unforgettable novel about a young southern girl's struggle with physical and sexual abuse, along with the stigma of being labeled "white trash" and "illegitimate." Ms. Allison's characters are vibrant and alive, especially the young girl, Bone, who poignantly tells the tale of her tormented youth. For all its literary worth, this is not a book that I would have read on my own. The story is deeply disturbing, not only in its content but in the underlying hopelessness of tone. One feels an overwhelming instinct to cradle Bone in one's arms to protect her from her frustrated, jealous, and emotionally disturbed stepfather and from her mother's senseless abandonment. Bone's reactions of burning anger, festering hatred, and perverted fantasies, along with her resultant self image, compound the hopelessness of her young life. Salvation and vindication can only be acquired through her love of gospel music...and although she's told repeatedly that she can't sing, her heart yearns and pleads to God for the gift of song. But the gift of salvation through Jesus that God freely offers is never accepted, and only Bone knows why. Instead of salvation, Bone finds a haven in the home of her lesbian aunt, Raylene. While Raylene is a compassionate, strong, and loving woman, the reader is left with the impression at the conclusion of the story that Bone struggles with her experiences for the rest of her life. Perhaps the quote by James Baldwin at the beginning of the book says it best: "People pay for what they do, and still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it simply: by the lives they lead."

Greenville County, South Carolina is a quiet southern town, home to black walnut trees with "knotty roots [that rise] out of the ground like the elbows and knees of dirty children suntanned dark and covered with scars." Greenville County is also home to Ruth Anne Boatwright, nicknamed Bone shortly after birth, a character with just as many scars as those walnut trees. In *Bone*, Dorothy Allison has created a character that is all at once strong and weak, heartbreaking and joyful, needy and independent, and overall a survivor. In *Bone*, she has created a character that is not soon forgotten in the mind or in the heart, and written a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age tale that just may break the reader's heart. Our journey with Bone in 1950's South Carolina introduces us to not only Bone but to the whole Boatwright family. Her mother Anney, only 15 years old when she gives birth, Anney's three brothers and two sisters, and Anney's parents, about which her brother Earle said "our mama's a rattlesnake and our daddy was a son of a gun." The stifling hot summers are spent on family porches where Bone would breathe in her Granny's scent "like the steam off soup," drink sweet tea, listen to stories and watch the dust stirred up by kids and dogs running wild just like the adults they have to look up to. Dorothy Allison brings to life a family scarred by poverty in which the women picked up endlessly after the men and seemed to begin aging immediately after birth,

and the men never seemed to age despite their cracked teeth, stints in jail and hard drinking. Bone enters this story labeled a bastard, "certified [so] by the state of South Carolina," her illegitimate status permanently stamped in red at the bottom of her birth certificate.

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