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THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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interconnections between politics and sex...

Just as the world of Orwell's *1984*
gripped our imaginations, so will
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The Washington Post Book World



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FAWCETT
CREST

*The
Handmaid's
Tale*

Margaret Atwood

A Fawcett Crest Book
Published by Ballantine Books
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A WEALTH OF PRAISE FOR ONE OF THE
YEAR'S MOST OUTSTANDING NOVELS

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

"Throughout her literary career, Canadian poet and novelist Margaret Atwood has impressed and delighted readers with her wit, lyric virtuosity, and imaginative acuity. But never before has she written a book in which these qualities were orchestrated so perfectly. . . . One hopes that this book will get the wide and diverse readership it deserves."

San Francisco Chronicle

"It is Atwood's achievement to have produced a political novel that avoids the pitfall of doctrinaire writing. Offred lives and breathes She is simply a warm, intelligent, ordinary woman who had taken for granted the freedoms she was to lose. . . . Her plight is always human as well as ideological."

The Washington Post Book World

"Atwood takes many trends which exist today and stretches them to their logical and chilling conclusions An excellent novel about the direction our lives are taking Read it while it's still allowed."

Houston Chronicle

(more)

"Atwood's tale makes a political point simply by the details of today it chooses to accentuate—the little evils we tend to ignore that signify the growing stain on the canvas. . . . Censorship, that *bête noire* that occasionally threatens to place feminism and the New Right in friendly camps, Atwood trounces with a political sensibility as savvy as it is life-affirming. Like a Cassandra roaming the pock-marked plains of the future, her handmaid manages to revere our freedoms, even while mourning their decadent legacies."

The Boston Globe

Margaret Atwood

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

"A sly and beautifully crafted story about the fate of one ordinary woman caught off guard by extraordinary events . . . A compelling fable for our time."

Glamour

"THE HANDMAID'S TALE has a serious political theme, and it makes a convincing case against the state's failure of compassion and imagination. But the novel succeeds so beautifully as a work of art because its argument is made through the humanity (and inhumanity) of its characters."

Newsday

"Atwood concentrates on what happens to women, especially to one woman, Offred, in a fascist country controlled by a group strikingly similar to the Moral Majority . . . A gripping suspense tale . . . An allegory of what results from a politics based on misogyny, racism, and anti-Semitism. . . . The depth and complexity of Atwood's critique of contemporary society are stunning. She has obviously thought long and hard about these issues. . . . **THE HANDMAID'S TALE** is a stark, even gruesome book, but it does not yield to despair."

Ms.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE

Margaret Atwood

"A real shocker . . . We the readers are an audience held captive by the pity and terror we feel at this cautionary tale."

Chicago Tribune Book World

*"We won't be the only ones to compare Margaret Atwood's haunting novel to Anthony Burgess's **A Clockwork Orange**—it's that frightening. Atwood examines life after the extreme right has had its way. Believe us, you won't want to live that long. Read this novel—then contribute to your favorite liberal cause."*

Playboy

Also by Margaret Atwood:

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STORIES IN ENGLISH
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***Published by Fawcett Books**

*For
Mary Webster and Perry Miller*

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.

—Genesis 30: 1–3

But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal

—Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*

In the desert there is no sign that says, Thou shalt not eat stones.

—Sufi proverb

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I

Night

I

We slept in what had once been the gymnasium. The floor was of varnished wood, with stripes and circles painted on it, for the games that were formerly played there; the hoops for the basketball nets were still in place, though the nets were gone. A balcony ran around the room, for the spectators, and I thought I could smell, faintly like an afterimage, the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in miniskirts, then pants, then in one earring, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, garlands made of tissue-paper flowers, cardboard devils, a revolving ball of mirrors, powdering the dancers with a snow of light.

There was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without a shape or name. I

remember that yearning, for something that was always about to happen and was never the same as the hands that were on us there and then, in the small of the back, or out back, in the parking lot, or in the television room with the sound turned down and only the pictures flickering over lifting flesh.

We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability? It was in the air; and it was still in the air, an afterthought, as we tried to sleep, in the army cots that had been set up in rows, with spaces between so we could not talk. We had flannelette sheets, like children's, and army-issue blankets, old ones that still said U.S. We folded our clothes neatly and laid them on the stools at the ends of the beds. The lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts.

No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns. Guns were for the guards, specially picked from the Angels. The guards weren't allowed inside the building except when called, and we weren't allowed out, except for our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field, which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The Angels stood outside it with their backs to us. They were objects of fear to us, but of something else as well. If only they would look. If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some tradeoff, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy.

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semidarkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our

heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed:

Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June.

II

Shopping