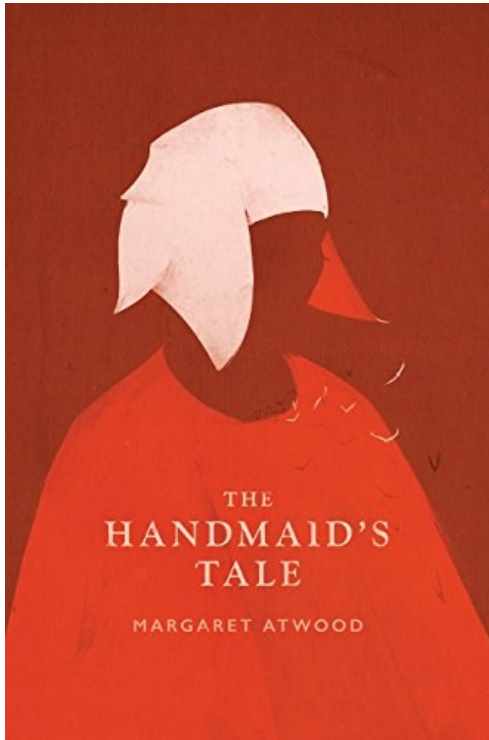


THE HANDMAID'S TALE



Book Summary:

In the near future, America becomes a puritanical theocracy and one woman tells about her only significance being her womb.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains profanity; violence; sexual activities; self-harm including suicide

Adult

By Margaret Atwood

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CONTENT WARNING

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Not For Minors
BookLooks Review Rating

Page	Content
3	There was old sex in the room and loneliness, and expectation, of something without a shape or name.
11	Stillborn, it was. Or, Stabbed her with a knitting needle, right in the belly. Jealousy, it must have been, eating her up. Or, tantalizingly, It was toilet cleaner she used. Worked like a charm, though you'd think he'd of tasted it. Must've been that drunk; but they found her out all right.
22	It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young. Then I find I'm not ashamed after all. I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there. I hope they get hard at the sight of us and have to rub themselves against the painted barriers, surreptitiously. They will suffer, later, at night, in their regimented beds. They have no outlets now except themselves, and that's a sacrilege. There are no more magazines, no more films, no more substitutes; only me and my shadow, walking away from the two men, who stand at attention, stiffly, by a roadblock, watching our retreating shapes.
32	Beside the main gateway there are six more bodies hanging, by the necks, their hands tied in front of them, their heads in white bags tipped sideways onto their shoulders. ...What they are hanging from is hooks. The hooks have been set into the brickwork of the Wall, for this purpose. ...Each has a placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed: a drawing of a human fetus. They were doctors, then, in the time before, when such things were legal. Angel makers, they used to call them; or was that something else?
34	No woman in her right mind, these days, would seek to prevent a birth, should she be so lucky as to conceive.
37	Lay is always passive. Even men used to say, I'd like to get laid. Though sometimes they said, I'd like to lay her.
54	She used to put the tape on when her friends came over and they'd had a few drinks.
56	I'm giving an underwhore party. ...You know, like Tupperware, only with underwear. Tarts' stuff. Lace crotches, snap garters. Bras that push your tits up. ...Working my way through college, says Moira. I've got connections. Friends of my mother's. It's big in the suburbs, once they start getting age spots they figure they've got to beat the competition. The Pornomarts and what have you.
60	My breasts are fingered in their turn, a search for ripeness, rot. ..."How do you think?" he says, still barely breathing it. Is that his hand, sliding up my leg? He's taken off the glove. "The door's locked. No one will come in. They'll never know it isn't his." He lifts the sheet. The lower part of his face is covered by the white gauze mask, regulation. Two brown eyes, a nose, a head with brown hair on it. His hand is between my legs. "Most of those old guys can't make it anymore," he says. "Or they're sterile."

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93	<p>Above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me. She too is fully clothed.</p> <p>My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge.</p> <p>My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose.</p> <p>Therefore I lie still and picture the unseen canopy over my head. I remember Queen Victoria's advice to her daughter: Close your eyes and think of England. But this is not England. I wish he would hurry up.</p> <p>Maybe I'm crazy and this is some new kind of therapy.</p> <p>I wish it were true; then I could get better and this would go away.</p> <p>Serena Joy grips my hands as if it is she, not I, who's being fucked, as if she finds it either pleasurable or painful, and the Commander fucks, with a regular two-four marching stroke, on and on like a tap dripping. He is preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a man who has other things on his mind. It's as if he's somewhere else, waiting for himself to come, drumming his fingers on the table while he waits. There's an impatience in his rhythm now. But isn't this everyone's wet dream, two women at once? They used to say that. Exciting, they used to say.</p> <p>...It has nothing to do with sexual desire, at least for me, and certainly not for Serena. Arousal and orgasm are no longer thought necessary; they would be a symptom of frivolity merely, like jazz garters or beauty spots: superfluous distractions for the light-minded.</p>
95	<p>Kissing is forbidden between us. This makes it bearable.</p> <p>One detaches oneself. One describes. He comes at last, with a stifled groan as of relief. Serena Joy, who has been holding her breath, expels it. The Commander, who has been propping himself on his elbows, away from our combined bodies, doesn't permit himself to sink down into us. He rests a moment, withdraws, recedes, rezippers. He nods, then turns and leaves the room, closing the door with exaggerated care behind him, as if both of us are his ailing mother.</p> <p>...I untangle myself from her body, stand up; the juice of the Commander runs down my legs. Before I turn away I see her straighten her blue skirt, clench her legs together; she continues lying on the bed, gazing up at the canopy above her, stiff and straight as an effigy.</p>
98	<p>He puts his hand on my arm, pulls me against him, his mouth on mine, what else comes from such denial?</p> <p>...My hand goes down, how about that, I could unbutton, and then.</p> <p>..."I was coming to find you," he says, breathes, almost into my ear. I want to</p>

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	reach up, taste his skin, he makes me hungry. His fingers move, feeling my arm under the nightgown sleeve, as if his hand won't listen to reason.
103	But this is wrong, nobody dies from lack of sex.
115	And Janine, up in her room, what does she do? Sits with the taste of sugar still in her mouth, licking her lips. Stares out the window. Breathes in and out. Caresses her swollen breasts. Thinks of nothing.
118	Aunt Lydia didn't show these kinds of movies. Sometimes the movie she showed would be an old porno film, from the seventies or eighties. Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. Once we had to watch a woman being slowly cut into pieces, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach slit open and her intestines pulled out.
125	Someone has spiked the grape juice. Someone has pinched a bottle, from downstairs. It won't be the first time at such a gathering; but they'll turn a blind eye. We too need our orgies.
133	She was now a loose woman.
136	On these days the Wives hang around for hours, helping to open the presents, gossiping, getting drunk. ...We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans.
139	I think about how I could approach the Commander, to kiss him, here alone, and take off his jacket, as if to allow or invite something further, some approach to true love, and put my arms around him and slip the lever out from the sleeve and drive the sharp end into him suddenly, between his ribs. I think about the blood coming out of him, hot as soup, sexual, over my hands.
144	Men are sex machines, said Aunt Lydia, and not much more. They only want one thing.
160	The sexual act, although he performed it in a perfunctory way, must have been largely unconscious, for him, like scratching himself.
161	I was conscious that my legs were hairy, in the straggly way of legs that have once been shaved but have grown back; I was conscious of my armpits too, although of course he couldn't see them. I felt uncouth. This act of copulation, fertilization perhaps, which should have been no more to me than a bee is to a flower, had become for me indecorous, an embarrassing breach of propriety, which it hadn't been before.
174	The Pornomarts were shut, though, and there were no longer any Feels on Wheels vans and Bun-Dle Buggies circling the Square.
180	They'd been in a march that day; it was during the time of the porn riots, or was it the abortion riots, they were close together. There were a lot of bombings then: clinics, video stores; it was hard to keep track.
184	While I read, the Commander sits and watches me doing it, without speaking but also without taking his eyes off me. This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it.

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204	She'd like me pregnant though, over and done with and out of the way, no more humiliating sweaty tangles, no more flesh triangles under her starry canopy of silver flowers.
209	Last night he had a drink, Scotch and water. ...He never offers me any, though, and I don't ask: we both know what my body is for. When I kiss him goodnight, as if I mean it, his breath smells of alcohol, and I breathe it in like smoke.
210	What about all the Pornycorners, it was all over the place, they even had it motorized. I'm not talking about sex, he says. That was part of it, the sex was too easy. Anyone could just buy it. There was nothing to work for, nothing to fight for.
211	I look up at the ceiling, the round circle of plaster flowers. Draw a circle, step into it, it will protect you. From the center was the chandelier, and from the chandelier a twisted strip of sheet was hanging down. That's where she was swinging, just lightly, like a pendulum; the way you could swing as a child, hanging by your hands from a tree branch.
219	Don't you remember the terrible gap between the ones who could get a man easily and the ones who couldn't? Some of them were desperate, they starved themselves thin or pumped their breasts full of silicone, had their noses cut off.
222	So now I imagine, among these Angels and their drained white brides, momentous grunts and sweating, damp furry encounters; or, better, ignominious failures, cocks like three-week-old carrots, anguished fumbblings upon flesh cold and unresponding as uncooked fish.
223	"What does he want? Kinky sex?"
226	Or you'd remember stories you'd read, in the newspapers, about women who had been found—often women but sometimes they would be men, or children, that was the worst—in ditches or forests or refrigerators in abandoned rented rooms, with their clothes on or off, sexually abused or not; at any rate killed.
242	My arms go around her, the wires propping up her breasts dig into my chest. We kiss each other, on one cheek, then the other.
243	"Not that it isn't great to see you. But it's not so great for you. What'd you do wrong? Laugh at his dick?"
249	"So here I am. They even give you face cream. You should figure out some way of getting in here. You'd have three or four good years before your snatch wears out and they send you to the boneyard. The food's not bad and there's drink and drugs, if you want it, and we only work nights."
260	Separate entrance, it would say in the ads, and that meant you could have sex, unobserved.
261	No preliminaries; he knows why I'm here. He doesn't even say anything, why fool around, it's an assignment. He moves away from me, turns off the lamp. Outside, like punctuation, there's a flash of lightning; almost no pause and then the thunder. He's undoing my dress, a man made of darkness, I can't see his face, and I can hardly breathe, hardly stand, and I'm not standing. His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my

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	<p>skin, again, arms around him, falling and water softly everywhere, never-ending. I knew it might only be once.</p> <p>...No preliminaries, he knows why I'm here. To get knocked up, to get in trouble, up the pole, those were all names for it once.</p>
262	<p>I get paid, you get laid, I rhyme in my head.</p> <p>...Still, it's amazing how easily it comes back to mind, this corny and falsely gay sexual banter.</p> <p>...He begins to unbutton, then to stroke, kisses beside my ear. "No romance," he says. "Okay?"</p> <p>That would have meant something else, once. Once it would have meant: no strings. Now it means: no heroics. It means: don't risk yourself for me, if it should come to that.</p> <p>And so it goes. And so.</p> <p>I knew it might only be once. Good-by, I thought, even at the time, good-by.</p> <p>There wasn't any thunder though, I added that in. To cover up the sounds, which I am ashamed of making.</p>
264	<p>Thinking: cheap. They'll spread their legs for anyone. All you need to give them is a cigarette.</p>
278	<p>He looks like a drunk that's been in a fight. Why have they brought a drunk in here? "This man," says Aunt Lydia, "has been convicted of rape."</p>

Profanity	Count
Bitch	6
Cock	1
Dick	1
Fuck	8
Piss	2
Shit	16
Tit	2