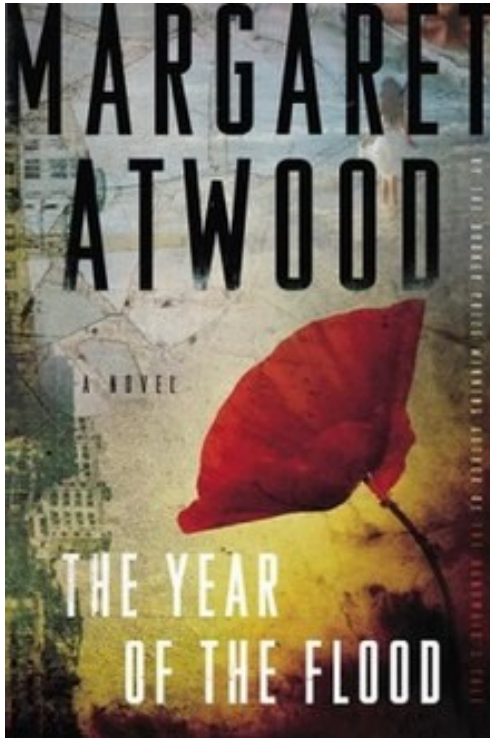


# THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD



*Adult*

**By Margaret Atwood**

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## **Book Summary:**

Two young girls recount their lives before the apocalypse, when they were dancers.

## **Summary of Concerns:**

This book contains sexual activities involving minors; child sex-trafficking; profanity; violence; controversial religious commentary; sexual nudity; alcohol use involving minors; suicide; illegal drug use; and cannibalism

**3** /5

**Minor Restricted**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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7	<p>Still, they checked everything, here at Scales. They had a reputation to keep up: we were known as the cleanest dirty girls in town.</p> <p>Scales and Tails took care of you, they really did. If you were talent, that is. Good food, a doctor if you needed one, and the tips were great, because the men from the top Corps came here. It was well run, though it was in a seedy area — all the clubs were. That was a matter of image, Mordis would say: seedy was good for business, because unless there's an edge something lurid or tawdry, a whiff of sleaze — what separated our brand from the run-of-the-mill product the guy could get at home, with the face cream and the white cotton panties?</p> <p>...He'd been in the business ever since he was a kid, and when they outlawed the pimps and the street trade — for public health and the safety of women, they said — and rolled everything into SeksMart under CorpSeCorps control, Mordis made the jump, because of his experience.</p> <p>...Also he didn't like waste: we were a valuable asset, he'd say. The cream of the crop. After the SeksMart roll-in, anyone left outside the system was not only illegal but pathetic.</p>
8	<p>You could watch TV or old movies, play your music, talk on the phone. Or you could visit the other rooms in Scales on the intercom video screens. Sometimes when we were doing plank work we'd wink at the cameras in mid-moan for the benefit of whoever was stuck in the Sticky Zone. We knew where the cameras were hidden, in the snakeskin or featherwork on the ceilings. It was one big family, at Scales, so even when you were in the Sticky Zone, Mordis like you to pretend you were still participating.</p>
12	<p>This is the moment that Science terms "The Big Bang," as if it were a sex orgy.</p>
21	<p>Plunder, no doubt. Rape and money, and other useless things.</p>
27	<p>They drank a six-pack between them, Toby two, her father four. Then, after Toby had gone to bed, her father went into the empty garage and stuck the Ruger into his mouth, and pulled the trigger.</p> <p>...They'd gone to the local church because the neighbors did and it would have been bad for business not to, but she'd heard her father say- privately, and after a couple of drinks- that there were too many crooks in the pulpit and too many dupes in the pews.</p>
28	<p>People would shake their heads- a shame but what could you do, and at least she had something of marketable value, namely her young ass, and therefore she wouldn't starve to death, and nobody had to feel guilty.</p>
30	<p>She didn't have any money they could seize but there were stories about female debtors being farmed out for sex. If she had to make her living on her back, she at least wanted to keep the proceeds.</p>
32	<p>On their more tranquil evenings, Toby would rub her flower preparations and herbal extract projects on him, and after that there would be a round of crisp, botanical-remedy-flavoured sex, followed by a shower-off and some popcorn, without salt or fat.</p>

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33	In return, the CorpSeCorps let the pleebmobs run the low-level kidnappings and assassinations, the skunkweed drug gro-ops, the crack labs and street-drug retailing, and the plank shops that were their stock-in-trade.
35	"Maybe you'll be okay- he's doing that girl Dora, and he mostly does just the one at a time, and you're kind of scrawny and he likes the curvy butts. But if he tells you to come to the office, look out. He's real jealous. He'll take a girl apart." ..."I'm too black and ugly for him, plus he just likes the kittens, not the old cats. Maybe you should wrinkle yourself up, sweetheart. Knock out a few of your teeth."
36	He'd ripped up a Scales girl- not a smuggled illegal-alien temporary, they got ripped up all the time, but one of the top talent, a star pole dancer. It was a big comedown and he was bitter about it- why should he suffer because of some slut?- so he hated the job. But he figured the girls were his perks. He had two pals, exbouncers like himself, who acted as his bodyguards, and they go the leavings. Supposing there was anything left. ...Around his neck was a tattooed chain, with a lock on it shaped like a red heart, nestled into the chest hair he displayed in the V of his open shirt. According to rumour, that chain when right down his back, twined around an upside-down naked woman whose head was stuck in his ass.
37	"Smart girl," said Blanco. "Come here. Take off my shirt." The tattoo on his back was just as Rebecca had described it: a naked woman, wound in chains, her head invisible. Her long hair waving up like flames. Blanco put his flayed hands around her neck. "Cross me up, I'll snap you like a twig," he said.
38	She'd been Blanco's one-and-only for less than two weeks, but it felt like years. His view was that a woman with an ass as skinny as Toby's should consider herself in luck if any man wanted to stick his hole-hammer into her. ...Nor did he give her any time off from her SecretBurgers duties. He demanded her services during their lunch break- the whole half-hour- which meant she got no lunch.
42	Any minute now he'd haul himself up and pulverize her. "Bitch!" he croaked. "I'll slice off your tits!"
55	"Keeping your butt in shape?" he said, so I held the videophone behind me. "Chickin' lickin' good," he said. Even if you were feeling ugly, he made you feel pretty. After that I hit the Snakepit video, to check the action and dance along to the music. It was strange to watch everything going on without me, as if I'd been erased. Crimson Petal was teasing the pole, Savona was subbing for me on the trapeze. She looked good glittery and green and sinuous, with a new silver Mo'Hair. I was considering one of those myself they were better than wigs, they never came off — but some girls said the smell was like lamb chops, especially in the rain. Savona was a little clumsy. She wasn't a trapeze girl, she was a pole girl, and she was top-heavy — she'd blown herself up like a beach ball. Stick her on stilettos, breathe on her from behind, and she'd do a vertical face-plant. "Whatever works," she'd say. "And, baby, this works."

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	<p>Now she was doing the upside-down splits move with the onehanded midstroke. She didn't convince me, but the men down there were never much interested in art: they'd think Savona was great unless she laughed instead of moaning, or actually fell off the trapeze.</p> <p>I left the Snakepit and flipped through the other rooms, but nothing much was going on. No fetishists, nobody who wanted to be covered in feathers or slathered in porridge or strung up with velvet ropes or writhed on by guppies. Just the daily grind.</p>
69	<p>Shackie and Croze and the older boys sometimes drank their wine instead of saving it. If they drank too much, they'd fall down or throw up, or they'd get into fights with the pleebrats and throw stones at the winos. In revenge, the winos would pee into empty wine bottles to see if they could trick us. I never drank any piss myself: all you had to do was smell the opening of the bottle. But some kids had deadened their noses by smoking the butt ends of cigarettes or cigars, or even skunkweed if they could get it, and they'd upend the bottle, then spit and swear.</p>
70	<p>We were supposed to glean in groups, so we could defend ourselves against the pleeb street gangs, or the winos who might grab our pails and drink the wine, or the child-snatchers who might sell us on the chicken-sex market.</p>
71	<p>Like everything else in our pleeb, this mallway had once been classier. There was a broken fountain full of empty beer cans, there were built-in planters with a lot of Zizzy Froot cans and cigarette butts and used condoms covered (said Nuala) in festering germs.</p> <p>...The Sinkhole pleebrats went into the holospinner to smoke dope- the booth reeked of it- and they had sex in there: we could tell because of the condoms and sometimes the panties they'd leave behind. Gardener kids weren't supposed to do either one of those things- hallucinogenics were for religious purposes, and sex was for those who'd exchanged green leaves and jumped the bonfire- but the older Gardener kids said they'd done them anyway.</p> <p>...Also Joltbars, and chewing gum that made your tongue glow in the dark, and red-lipped ashtrays that slid, Let Me Blow It For You, and In-Your-Skin Etcha-Tattoos the Eves said would burn your skin down to the veins.</p> <p>...The Real Woman Stick-on Bimplants, with responsive nipples? Ren, you suck!</p>
74	<p>That alleyway was dangerous. Scales and Tails was a dirt den, said the Eves. We should never, ever go into it, especially not girls. It said, ADULT ENTERTAINMENT in neon over the door, which was guarded at night by two enormous men in black suits who wore sunglasses even though it was dark. One of the older Gardener girls claimed these men had said to her, "Come back in a year and bring your sweet little ass."</p>
79	<p>There were forbidden objects in the stairwell- needles, used condoms, spoons, candle ends. The Gardeners said pleeb crooks and thugs and pimps got in at night and used the stairwell for nasty parties; we'd never seen any of these, though we'd once caught Shackie and Croze and their pals drinking wine dregs in there.</p>
84	<p>"I bet she had hot panties for him," said Amanda. We were whispering all of this in our cubicle, at night, with Zeb and Lucerne right nearby, so it was hard not to hear the sex noises they'd make.</p>

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85	"I tried to hitch, but I only got one lift, with a guy who said he was a chicken farmer," she said. "He pushed his hand between my legs; you can tell that's coming when they breathe funny. I stuck my fingers in his eyes and got out of there fast."
86	She was very pretty, with her tawny skin and her long neck and her big eyes, but you could be pretty and still get called a carrot-sucker or a meat-hole on legs by those boys; they had a bunch of sick names for girls.
103	Though maybe it was the sex, Toby thought. A mirage of the flesh, a hormone-fueled obsession. It happened to a lot of people. ...She'd had no sex recently, nor did she miss it: during her immersion in the Sewage Lagoon she'd had far too much sex, though not the kind anyone would want. Freedom from Blanco was worth a lot: she was lucky she hadn't ended up fucked into a purée and battered to a pulp and poured out onto a vacant lot. There had been one sex-linked incident at the Gardeners: old Mugi the Muscle had leapt on her when she was putting in an hour on one of the Run-For-Your-Light Treadmills in the former party room at the top of the Boulevard Condos. He'd pulled her off the treadmill and tussled her to the floor, then fallen heavily on top of her and groped under her denim skirt, wheezing like a faulty pump.
116	She was really very restless, because her husband was cold as a crypt, and they never made love any more because he was too busy with his career.
119	And Lucerne had put face and ex-name together, and he'd had to distract her with sex, then take her with im to ensure her loyalty.
120	These kids were only seven or eight, but there were a lot of them, and when they spotted her they stopped yelling at one another and started yelling at her. Goddie goddie, whitey bitch!
121	She was alone, and he wasn't above a random stomp-and-rape. He'd drag her up that very same alleyway, the one where the pleebrats had gone. Then he'd rip off the cone and see who she was. And that would be the end, but it wouldn't be a quick end. It would be as slow as he could make it. He'd turn her into a flesh billboard- a not-quite-living demonstration of his rank finesse.
130	. It was best to get them wasted, but it had to be fast or they'd go into full rage mode. ...bonus when it's them." We'd feed them drinks and pills, with a shovel if we could. There was something new they'd started using just after I went into the Sticky Zone BlyssPluss, it was called. Hassle free sex, total satisfaction, blow you right out of your skin, plus 100 percent protection — that was the word on it. Scales girls weren't allowed to do drugs on the job — we weren't paid to enjoy ourselves, said Mordis but this was different, because if you took it you didn't need a Biofilm Bodyglove, and a lot of customers would pay extra that way. Scales was testing the BlyssPluss for the ReJoov Corp, so they weren't handing it out like candy — it was mostly for the top customers — but I could hardly wait to try it. ...For the basic bristle work they brought in the temporaries — smuggled Eurotrash or Tex-Mexicans or Asian Fusion and Redfish minors scooped off the streets because the Painball guys wanted membrane, and after they were finished

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	<p>you'd be judged contaminated until proved otherwise, and Scales didn't want to spend Stick Zone money either testing these girls or fixing them up. I never saw them twice. They walked in the door, but I don't think they walked out. In a shoddier club they'd have been used for the guys acting out their vampire fantasies, but that involved mouth-to-blood contact, and as I said, Mordis liked to keep it clean.</p> <p>That night one of the Painball guys had Starlite on his lap, giving him the signature twist. She was in her peagret-feather outfit with the headdress, and maybe she was terrific from the front, but from my angle of vision it looked like the guy had a big blue-green duster working him over— like a dry carwash.</p> <p>The second guy was gazing up at Savona with his mouth open and his head so far back it was almost at right angles to his spine. If her grip slips, she'll snap his neck. If that happens, I thought, he won't be the first guy to be carted out the back door of Scales and dumped in a vacant lot with no clothes on.</p> <p>...The third one was drinking himself into mud.</p>
132	Amanda was older: she'd already grown tits.
133	"You've got someone else!" Lucerne would say. "I can smell bitch all over you!"
137	<p>"No wonder her bum's so wobbly," said Amanda. "It's getting worn out. It's like Veena's old sofa- all saggy."</p> <p>"I don't believe you!" I said. "She couldn't be doing it! Not with Burt!"</p> <p>...We Gardeners kids often made up rude stories about the sex lives of the Adams and Eves. It took away some of their power to imagine them naked, either with each other or with stray dogs, or even with the green-skinned girls in the pictures outside Scales and Tails. Still, Nuala moaning and flailing around with Burt the Knob was a hard picture.</p> <p>.... "It reeks of skunkweed." She was an authority: she'd lived out there in the Exfernal World, she'd even done some drugs. Not much though, she said, because you lost your edge with drugs, you should only buy them from people you trusted because anything could have anything in it, and she didn't trust anybody much. I'd nag her to let me try some, but she wouldn't. "You're a baby," she'd say. Or else she'd say she had no good contacts since she'd been with the Gardeners.</p> <p>"There can't be a gro-op in here," I said. "This building's Gardener. It's only the pleebmobs who have gro-ops. It's just- kids smoke it in here, at night. Pleeb kids."</p>
141	The pleebrats had sprayed their tages and messages all over the walls: I LV pssys (BBQd). SK my dk, it's organic!
143	<p>"The fact is, we don't know for sure. We just suspect that your father is humping the Wet Witch. Maybe he isn't. But you could understand him doing it, with your mother in a Fallow state so much. He must get very horny- that's why he's always groping little girls' armpits."</p> <p>..."...it's something you should be aware of. I mean, if I had a father, I wouldn't want him humping someone's generative organ, other than my mother's. It's a filthy habit- so unsanitary. You'd have to worry about his gemy hands touching you. Though I'm sure he doesn't-</p>
148	There'd be pleebland families having cookouts and family fights, and we'd hold our noses to avoid the stink of frizzling meat; there'd be couples thrashing around in the bushes, or homeless people drinking from bottles or snoring under the

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	trees, or tangle-haired crazes talking to themselves or shouting, or druggies shooting up.
150	I didn't see how anyone- even Wet Witch Nuala- could do sex with Burt the Knob.
151	"Illegal growing of marijuana for black-market profit, sir," said the second one.
152	All I could imagine was that Bernice had gone back that day after we'd been so mean to her at the Tree of Life, and told Veena about Burt and Nuala having sex, and also about the armpit-groping, and that had made Veena so jealous or angry that she'd got in contact with the CorpSeCorps and made an accusation.
154	"They got some of that superweed for us. The stuff Burt the Knob was growing." ... "They've put bags of it in the cellar," said Shackie. "They must've harvested all the gro-op rooms. You could get blasted just breathing."
155	"I've done this shit," said Shackie. ... "Me too, you feel like you're airborne," said Croze. "Like a fucking bird!" Shackie was already rolling the shredded leaves, already lighting up, already sucking in. There was someone's hand on my bum, I didn't know whose. It was creeping up, trying to find a way in under my Gardener one-piece dress. ... "Just give it a try," said Shackie. He took hold of my chin and stuck his mouth down on mine and blew me full of smoke. I coughed, and he did it again, and I felt very dizzy.
166	The Gardeners mistrusted everyone in the Exfernal World, but they trusted their own. Now they'd joined the long list of the religious faithful who'd woken one morning to find that the vicar had made off with the church building fund, leaving a trail of molested choirboys behind him. At least Burt hadn't done any choirboy molesting, or not as far as was known. There'd been gossip among the children-crude remarks of the kind children made- but they hadn't been about boys. Just girls, and just groping.
173	But it wasn't just ordinary skunkweed, not even West Coast superweed: it was a stratospheric splice, with some peyote genes and psilocybins, and even a little ayahuasca the good part, though they hadn't completely eliminated the part that made you puke your guts out. A lot of people who'd tried this would kill to do it again, and there wasn't much being made yet, so it was going for a very high price on the market.
174	He had a T-shirt too: STRIPPERS LOVE MY POLE.
179	"Deathbed promises are sacred among us," said Pilar. "You know that. Don't cry. Look at me. I'm not sad." Toby knew the theory: Pilar believed that she was donating herself to the matrix of Life through her own volition, and she also believed that this should be a matter of celebration.
182	Once she'd pulled herself together and arranged her face, Toby went to tell Adam One. "Pilar died," she said. "She took care of it herself." "Yes, my dear. I know," said Adam One. "We discussed it. She used the Death Angel, and then the Poppy?" Toby nodded. "But — this is a delicate matter, and I am counting on your discretion — she didn't feel the Gardeners at large should be told the entire truth. Final self-journeying is a moral option only for the experienced and, I have to say, only for the terminally ill, as Pilar was; but it's not

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	one we should make widely available — especially not to our young people, who are impressionable and prone to indulge in morbid sulking and false heroics.
183	Pillar would never have made such a mistake: the older Gardeners must know that. But maybe it was only a way of talking, just as suicide used to be called "death by misadventure."
188	Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching.
189	"It's the Vatican's porn collection," Zeb told her.
191	Adam Once said they should meditate overnight and perhaps the solution would arrive by visionary inspiration. Philo said in that case he'd toke up.
200	Shiny new toes make you feel all fresh and sparkling: if someone wants to suck your toes, those toes should be worth sucking.
201	<p>The Moon in your sign, Scorpio, means your hormones are pumped this week! It's hot, hot, hot! Enjoy, but don't take this sexy flareup too seriously- it will pass.</p> <p>...When I checked in on the Snakepit again, it was really crowded. Savona was still on the trapeze, and Crimson Petal was up there too, in a Biofilm Bodysuit with extra genital ruffles so she looked like a giant orchid. Down below, Starlite was still working away on the Painballer customer. That girl could raise the dead, but he was so close to being unconscious that I didn't think she'd be getting a big tip out of him.</p> <p>...Mordis was herding the new Painballer to the far corner. Now he was barking into his cell; now three backup dancers were hurrying over: Vilya, Crenola, Sunset. Block the view, he must've told them. Use your tits, why in hell did God make them? There was shimmering, a flurry of feathers, six arms twining around him. I could almost hear what Vilya was saying into the guys ear: Take two, honey, they're cheap.</p>
202	<p>Now the dancers were all over this guy like anacondas. Two Scales bouncers on standby.</p> <p>Mordis was grinning: situation solved. He'd steer this one into the feather-ceiling rooms, dump in some alcohol, stick some girls on top of him, and he'd be what Mordis called one blitzed-out brain-dead squeeze-dried happy zombie. And now that we had BlyssPlus, he'd get multiple orgasms and wuzzy comfy feelings, with no microbe-death downside. The furniture breakage at Scales had tanked since they'd been using that stuff. They were serving it in chocolate-dipped polyberries, and in Soylectable olives- though you had to make sure not to overdo it, said Starlite, or the guy's dick might split.</p>
204	<p>"She's yelling too loud. Oh wait- she says he's having sex with Nuala."</p> <p>..."Men'll have sex with anything, given the chance," said Amanda.</p> <p>"Now she's saying he's a pimp at heart. And he despises her and treats her like shit. I she's crying."</p>
207	She never when out at night because of the drunks and druggies on the street corners, and the pleebat gangs and muggers.



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211	We'd been grabbed off the street while in SolarSpace doing some boutique shopping, but she couldn't say exactly where we'd been taken because she'd never been allowed to know. She said it wasn't the fault of the cult itself — it was one of the male members who'd been obsessed with her and wanted her for his personal sex slave, and had taken away her shoes to keep her captive. This was supposed to be Zeb, though she said she didn't know his name. I'd been too young to realize what was going on, she said, but I'd been a hostage she'd had to do the bidding of this madman, service his every twisted whim, it was revolting the things he'd made her do — or my life would have been in danger.
216	At least they hadn't heard about Lucerne's sex-slave lust-mad pervert story.
217	Jimmy grinned. "Did you worship cabbages?" he went on. "Oh Great Cabbage, I kiss your cabbagey cabbageness! He went down on one knee and grabbed a handful of my pleated skirt. "Nice leaves, do they come off?"
218	What she'd don had been for love, or just sex.
219	The next time we were on the phone she said, "Look who's here," and it was Shackie, grinning at me sheepishly, and I wondered if they'd been having sex together. ...I did wonder whether it had been his hand on my bum, that night I passed out in the holospinner. ...But it was a fair trade: she got someone watching her back and her lift stuff and sell it, and he got sex.
220	I liked her all right too, although she smoked too much, which made me cough. Nobody at the Gardeners smoked, or at least not cigarettes.
222	What if the CorpSeCorps were still trying to track down Lucerne's pretend sex-slaver? ...I thought they were probably watching porn- most of the guys did, and a lot of girls too- so I asked what games. ...So I guessed that they really were watching porn.
223	I put my arms around him and hugged him: he was sort of crying. I started crying too, and we stroked each other carefully, as if both of us had broken arms or diseases, and then we slid tenderly into my bed, still holding on to each other as if we were drowning, and we started kissing each other.
224	I wrote in my diary: JIMMY. Then I underlined it in red and drew a red heart. I still distrusted writing enough not to put in every thing that was happening, but each time we had sex I drew another heart and coloured it in. I wanted to phone Amanda and tell her about it, even though Amanda had said once that people telling you about their sex was as boring as people telling you about their dreams.
226	Despite that we were still having sex, though not very often- the red hearts in my diary were getting farther and farther apart. Then I saw Jimmy by accident at the mall with this foul-mouthed older girl called LyndaLee, who was rumored to be going through all the boys at school, one by one but fast, like eating soynuts. Jimmy had his hand right on her ass, and then she pulled down his head and kissed him. It was a long, wet kiss.

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	<p>...I wrote in my diary, Jimmy you nosy brat I know your reading this, I hate it just because I fucked you doesn't mean I like you so STAY OUT!</p> <p>...After the sex I took a shower by myself, and when I came out, Jimmy was reading my diary, and said why did I hate him all of a sudden?</p>
227	<p>I walked up to Glenn in the cafeteria- it took a lot of courage because Glenn was so cool he was practically frozen. And I asked him if he'd like to hang out with me. What I had in mind was that I'd have sex with Glenn, and Jimmy would find out and be wrecked. Not that I wanted sex with Glenn, it would be like shagging a salad server.</p>
249	<p>Toby said no Gardener smoked- not tobacco- so to be caught doing so would blow her cover.</p>
252	<p>"He was drunk."          "Not drunk: wasted," said Amanda with authority.</p>
281	<p>"Open the fucking door, asshole," he said. "Bitch in heat! Time to share!"</p>
289	<p>So I told her about my roommate, Buddy the Third, and she said the entire Martha Graham Academy was filled with people like that- Exfernals frittering away their time on Earth without one serious thought in their heads except drinking and getting laid.</p> <p>...But they'd looked like leather. So she'd burnt them. And thank God she didn't have to share a bathroom with him any more, because she could hear him doing sexual things with girls practically every night, like some degenerate bonobo/rabbit splice.</p> <p>..."That time I told you he was having sex with Nuala, and you told Veena, and she blew up and called the CorpSeCorps? Well, I don't think he was having sex with Nuala. Me and Amanda — we kind of made it up because we were being mean. I feel terrible about it, and I'm really sorry. I don't think he ever did anything worse than girls' armpits."</p> <p>"At least Nuala was a grown-up," said Bernice. "But he didn't stop at the armpits. With the girls. He was a degenerate, just like my mother said. He used to tell me I was his favorite little girl, but not even that was true..."</p>
294	<p>My dance Calisthenics teacher said I should talk to Scales and Tails. I was a good enough dancer, and Scales was part of SeksMart now, which was a legitimate Corp with health benefits and a dental plan, so it wasn't like being a prostitute. A lot of girls went into it, and some of them met nice men that way and did very well in life afterwards. So I thought I might try for it.</p>
295	<p>I'd be working with women, not with men who'd be drunk and violent as they often were at Scales, even if it did have a dental plan; and I wouldn't have to wear a Biofilm Bodysuit and let strange men touch me.</p>
300	<p>We went into her kitchen, which had a lot of her designs pinned up on the walls, and some bones here and there; and we had a beer each. I've never liked drinking alcohol that much, but this was special.</p> <p>..."Why her?" I said. Amanda said she'd heard it was some old sexual thing; which was puzzling, she said, because sexual things and Toby had never fitted together, which was most likely why we kids had called her Dry Witch. And I said maybe</p>

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	<p>Toby had been wetter than we'd thought, and Amanda laughed, and said obviously I still believed in miracles.</p>
303	<p>I didn't like the other parts of the job that much, but I did like the trapeze dancing, because nobody could touch you then. You were up in the air, like a butterfly. I used to picture Jimmy looking at me, and thinking that it ws really me he'd loved all along, not Wakulla Price or LyndaLee or any of the others, or even Amanda, and that I was dancing just for him.</p>
305	<p>For the finales of these meetings he'd rent the feather-ceiling room and order up the drinks and the drugs and the Scalies not for himself, but for the guys he'd bring with him. Sometimes he'd even entertain the top CorpSeMen. They were sinister, those guys. I never had to do the Painballers, but I had to do the CorpSeMen, and they were my least favorite clients. It was like they had machine parts in behind their eyes.</p> <p>Occasionally Glenn would rent two or three Scalies for the whole evening, not for sex but for some very strange things. Once he wanted us to purr like cats so he could measure our vocal cords. Another time he wanted us to sing like birds beings — their cruelty and suffering, their wars and poverty, their fear of death. "What would you pay for the design of a perfect human being?" he'd say. Then he'd hint that the Paradice Project was designing one, and they'd dump more money on him.</p> <p>For the finales of these meetings he'd rent the feather-ceiling room and order up the drinks and the drugs and the Scalies not for himself, but for the guys he'd bring with him. Sometimes he'd even entertain the top CorpSeMen. They were sinister, those guys. I never had to do the Painballers, but I had to do the CorpSeMen, and they were my least favourite clients. It was like they had machine parts in behind their eyes.</p> <p>Occasionally Glenn would rent two or three Scalies for the whole evening, not for sex but for some very strange things. Once he wanted us to purr like cats so he could measure our vocal cords. Another time he wanted us to sing like birds so he could record us. Starlite complained to Mordis that this wasn't what we were paid for, but Mordis only said, "So, he's a loony. You've seen those before. But he's a rich loony and he's harmless, so just humour him."</p> <p>I was part of the threesome the night he gave us a sort of quiz.</p>
306	<p>He said she wanted to familiarize herself with Scales because ReJoov had picked us as one of their prime time venues, and she'd be explaining a new product to us- the BlyssPluss pill, which would solve every known problem connected with sex. We had been awarded the privilege of introducing it to our clients. This woman had a ReJoov executive title- Senior VP Satisfaction Enhancement- though her real job was Glenn's main plank.</p> <p>I could tell she'd been one of us: a girl for rent, of one kind or another. It was obvious if you knew the signs. She was acting all the time, giving nothing away about herself. I'd watch them onscreen: I was curious because Glenn was such a cold fish, but he could have sex all right, just like a human being. This girl had more moves than an octopus, and her plankwork was astonishing. Glenn acted like she was the first, last, and only girl on the planet. Mordis used to watch them</p>

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	too, and he said Scales would pay this girl top dollar. But I told him he couldn't afford her: she was way out of his price range.
307	<p>Mordis told us not to forge personal bonds with the customers, because if they wanted a relationship they could get one elsewhere. He said that Scales customers didn't care about your life history, they just wanted epidermis and fantasy. They wanted to be carried away to NeverNever Land, where they could have sinful experiences they'd never, never be able to have at home. Dragon ladies winding around them, snake women slithering over them. So we should save our private emotional crap for people who actually cared about us, like the other Scalies.</p> <p>One night Glenn arranged an evening of extra-special treatment — for an extra-special guest, he said. He ordered up the feather room with the green bedspread, plus the most powerful Scales and Tails martinis — "kicktails," they called them — plus two Scalies, me and Crimson Petal. Mordis picked us because Glenn said this extra-special guest preferred the slender body type.</p> <p>"Does he want the schoolgirl sailor suit thing?" I asked; sometimes that's what "slender body type" meant. "Do I need to bring my skipping If so I'd have to change, because right then I was in full glitter.</p> <p>"This guy's already so shitfaced he doesn't know what he wants," Mordis said.</p> <p>"Just give him your all, baby bunny. We want to see the high number tips. Make those multiple zeroes shoot right out of his ears."</p> <p>When we got to the room, the guy was lying on the green satin bedspread as if he'd been thrown from a plane, but happy about it, because he had a whole-body grin.</p> <p>.... I knew he wouldn't know it was me: I was covered in glitz, and he was flying so high he was almost blind. So I just slid into the usual act and started in on his buttons and Velcro. We Scalies used to call it "peeling the shrimp."</p> <p>"Oh, nice abs," I whispered. "Honey, just lie back."</p> <p>Did I hate this or love it? Why did it have to be one or the other? As Vilya always said about her boobs, Take two, they're cheap.</p>
311	Their minds may already have been destroyed by drugs and torture, their bodies melted into garboil.
318	Then we put on the green Scales dressing gowns Mordis kept for his best girls and sat around eating Joltbars from the minifridge and drinking some beers we'd found downstairs, and telling each other the stories of why it was that we were still alive.
321	Certainly there's some grunting going on, and some juvenile squealing, as there used to be when the topless bars in the Sewage Lagoon closed at night.
324	In the evenings we'd have a few drinks- there were still some unbroken bottles behind the bar- and raid the expensive tinned foods Mordis kept for the high-roller clients and also for his best girls. Loyalty Snacks, he called them; he'd dish them out when you'd gone the extra mile, though you never knew in advance what that extra mile would be.
332	<p>"There's some Scotch left, or we could make you coffee."</p> <p>...There was some orange-coloured juice in the freezer, so Amanda mixed up mimosas with the champagne that was left.</p>

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333	"Product?" said Amanda. "You were pushing superweed? Cool!" She laughed.
336	"Relax," said Amanda. "Those guys and me did lots of stuff together. Why would they hurt us?" "I don't want to be a time-share meat-hole," I said. ...Then we heard voices coming along the street. They were singing and yelling, the way men did at Scales when they're more than drunk. Stinking drunk, smashing-up drunk.
339	A pharmacy- they'd trashed it completely, looking for party drugs. There were a lot of empty BlyssPluss containers. I'd thought it was just at the testing stage, but that place must have been selling it black market.
340	I thought maybe we should have sex: it would have been a kind and generous thing to do. But everyone was too tired, and also we were shy with one another. It was the surroundings- though the Gardeners weren't there in their bodies, they were there in Spirit, and it was hard to do anything they'd have disapproved of if they'd seen us doing it when we were ten.
354	The bird woman. Some freak from a sex circus.
375	It's Oates. He's hanging from a tree, twisting slowly. The rope is passed under his arms and knotted at the back. He doesn't have any clothes on except for his socks and shoes. This makes it worse, because he's less like a statue that way. His head is thrown back, too far because his throat has been cut; crows flap around his head, scrabbling for footholds. His blond hair's all matted. There's a gaping wound in his back, like those on the bodies they used to dump in vacant lots after a kidney theft. But these kidneys wouldn't have been stolen for transplants.
388	"Zeb would never tell us who you were. We thought you were some hot bimbo he had."
394	When the afternoon thunderstorm wakes me up, Croze is curled around behind me, and I can tell he's worried and sad; so I turn around and then we're hugging each other, and he wants to have sex. But all of a sudden I don't want to have sex without loving the person, and I haven't really loved anybody in that way since Jimmy; certainly not at Scales, where it was just acting, with other people's kinky scripts.
395	They were the ones who'd done the heavy lifting on the BlyssPluss pill too, but they weren't allowed to take it themselves. Not that they were tempted: it gave you the best sex ever, but it had serious side effects, such as death. ..."They said Crake ordered them to put it in the supersex pill." I felt lucky all over again that I'd been in the Sticky Zone because I might've gulped down the BlyssPluss pill secretly even though Mordis said no drugs for Scalies. It sounded so great, like a whole other reality. ..."A poison sex pill?" It was Glenn, it must have been. .... I'd thought it was just sex talk, with Glenn and his main plank: a lot of people used animal names at such times. ...So, not sex talk: codenames. Or maybe both. For one split second I think about saying all this to Croze — how I know quite a lot about this Crake from a former life. But then I'd have to tell about what I used to do at Scales — not just the trapeze dancing or even Glenn making us purr and sing

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	like birds, but the other things, the feather-ceiling room things. Croze wouldn't want to hear about that: guys hate to picture other guys doing sex things with you that they want to do themselves.
396	"No, I swear," say Croze. "They get these huge- their dicks turn blue. Then they have group sex with these blue-assed women. It's wicked!" ... "Rhino says the guy was a waste of time. Told a lot of stupid jokes, drank too much."
397	He puts his arm around me, lets his hand fall onto my breast, as if by accident.
410	"But the other woman that came was frightened when we sang to her and offered her flowers, and signaled to her with our penises," says the chief one. ... "Yes. Taller. She was not well. Also she was sad. We would have purred over her and made her better. Then we could have mated with her." ... "We wished her to choose which four of us she would copulate with," says the main one. "Perhaps the woman with you will choose. She smells very blue!" At this, the men all smile- they have brilliantly white teeth- and their penises point at me and wag from side to side like the tails of happy dogs. Four? All at once? I don't want Toby to shoot any of these men- they seem so gentle, and they're very good-looking- but also I don't want those bright-blue penises anywhere near me.
417	"Who'd get their dick tattooed?" says the bearded one. "Savages will tattoo anything," says the other. "It's some cannibal thing." ... "Bet they'd human-sacrifice her in about two minutes," says the bearded one. "After they all had sex with her." ... "We're talkin' to you, bitch," he says. Amanda raises her head. "A sex toy you can eat," says the shorthair, and the two of them laugh. ... "With the savages. They get this one, they seem to want her so much, stick their blue dicks into her, and we get some of those hot babes of theirs. Fuckin' good deal!" I see Amanda as they see her: used up, worn out. Worthless.
418	"We gonna feed her?" says the shorthair. He's licking his fingers. "Giver her some of yours," says the bearded one. "She's no use to us dead." "No use to me dead," says the shorthair. "You're such a pervert you'd plank a fuckin' corpse." "Speaking of which, your tun first. Get the pump primed. I hate a dry fuck." ... "Great! The other bimbo," says the bearded one. "Now we'll have one each!" He's grinning.

Profanity	Count
Ass	9
Bitch	15
Dick	5
Fuck	42
Piss	15
Shit	27