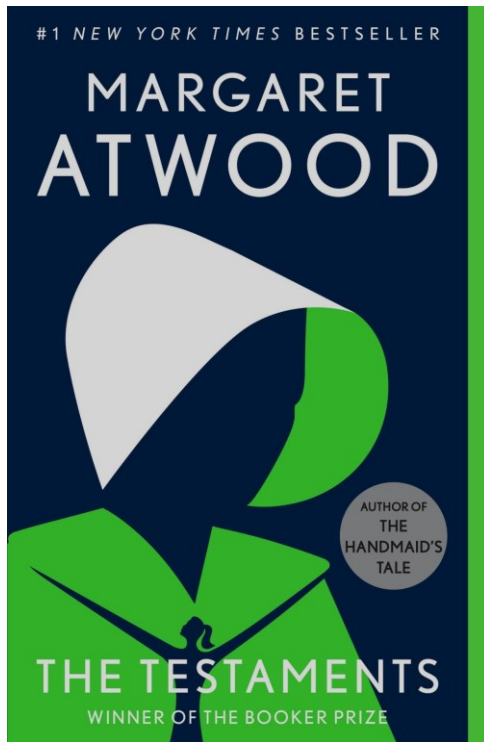


THE TESTAMENTS



Book Summary:

Three women give testimony regarding the roles they played in attempting to destroy a dystopian society.

Summary of Concerns:

This book contains explicit sexual activities; child molestation; references to pedophilia; self-harm involving suicide; mild/infrequent profanity; violence; controversial religious commentary; and alcohol use.

Adult

By Margaret Atwood

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3 /5

Minor Restricted
BookLooks Review Rating

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19	<p>As for Jemima, that name came from a story in the Bible. Jemima was a very special little girl because her father, Job, was sent bad luck by God as part of a test, and the worst part of it was that all Job's children were killed. All his sons, all his daughters: killed! It sent shudders through me every time I heard about it. It must have been terrible, what Job felt when he was told that news.</p> <p>But Job passed the test, and God gave him some other children—several sons, and also three daughters—so then he was happy again. And Jemima was one of those daughters. "God gave her to Job, just as God gave you to me," said my mother.</p> <p>...I was pleased with this story. It was only later that I pondered it: how could Job have allowed God to fob off a batch of new children on him and expect him to pretend that the dead ones no longer mattered?</p>
55	<p>A Pearl Girl identified only as "Aunt Adrianna" had been found dead in a condo that she and her Pearl Girls companion had rented. She'd been tied to a doorknob with her own silvery belt around her neck. She'd been dead for a number of days, said the forensic expert. It was another condo owner who'd detected the smell and alerted the police. The police said it was a suicide, self-strangulation in this manner being a common method.</p>
63	<p>This Wife has lasted longer than usual. His Wives have a habit of dying: Commander Judd is a great believer in the restorative powers of young women, as were King David and assorted Central American drug lords. After each respectable period of mourning, he has let it be known that he is in the market for another child bride.</p>
96	<p>He said, "Perfect teeth. Perfect." Then he said, "You're getting to be a big girl, Agnes." Then he put his hand on my small but growing breast. It was summer, so I was wearing the summer school uniform, which was pink and made of light cotton.</p> <p>I froze, in shock. So it was all true then, about men and their rampaging, fiery urges, and merely by sitting in the dentist chair I was the cause. I was horribly embarrassed—what was I supposed to say? I didn't know, so I simply pretended it wasn't happening.</p> <p>Dr. Grove was standing behind me, so it was his left hand on my left breast. I couldn't see the rest of him, only his hand, which was large and had reddish hairs on the back. It was warm. It sat there on my breast like a large hot crab. I didn't know what to do. Should I take hold of his hand and move it off my breast? Would that cause even more burning lust to break forth? Should I try to get away? Then the hand squeezed my breast. The fingers found my nipple and pinched. It was like having a thumbtack stuck into me. I moved the upper part of my body forward—I needed to get out of that dentist chair as fast as I could—but the hand was locking me in. Suddenly it lifted, and then some of the rest of Dr. Grove moved into sight.</p> <p>"About time you saw one of these," he said in the normal voice in which he said everything. "You'll have one of them inside you soon enough." He took hold of my right hand and positioned it on this part of himself.</p> <p>I don't think I need to tell you what happened next. He had a towel handy. He wiped himself off and tucked his appendage back into his trousers.</p> <p>"There," he said. "Good girl. I didn't hurt you." He gave me a fatherly pat on the shoulder. "Don't forget to brush twice a day, and floss afterwards. Mr. William will give you a new toothbrush."</p> <p>I walked out of the room, feeling sick to my stomach.</p>
97	<p>The Aunts at school taught us that you should tell someone in authority—meaning them—if any man touched you inappropriately, but we knew not to be so dumb as to make a fuss,</p>

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	<p>especially if it was a well-respected man like Dr. Grove. Also, what would it do to Becka if I said that about her father? She would be humiliated, she would be devastated. It would be a terrible betrayal.</p> <p>Some girls had reported such things. One had claimed their Guardian had run his hands over her legs. Another had said that an Econo trash collector had unzipped his trousers in front of her. The first girl had had the backs of her legs whipped for lying, the second had been told that nice girls did not notice the minor antics of men, they simply looked the other way. ...“I should have gone with you,” she said. “But he’s the best dentist. Everyone agrees.” She knew. Or she suspected. She was warning me not to say anything. That was the kind of coded language they used. Or I should say: that we all used. Did Paula know too? Did she foresee that such a thing would happen to me at Dr. Grove’s? Is that why she sent me by myself?</p> <p>It must have been so, I decided. She’d done it on purpose so I would have my breast pinched and that polluting item thrust in front of me. She’d wanted me to be defiled. That was a word from the Bible: defiled. She was probably having a malicious laugh about it—about the nasty joke she’d played on me, for I could see that in her eyes it would be viewed as a joke.</p>
148	<p>Were there insects? Yes, there were insects. They did not bite me, so I expect they were cockroaches. I could feel their tiny feet tiptoeing across my face, tenderly, tentatively, as if my skin were thin ice. I did not slap them. After a while you welcome any kind of touch.</p> <p>One day, if it was a day, three men came into my cell without warning, shone a glaring light into my blinking purblind eyes, threw me onto the floor, and administered a precise kicking, and other attentions. The noises I emitted were familiar to me: I had heard them nearby. I won’t go into any further details, except to say that Tasers were also involved.</p> <p>No, I was not raped. I suppose I was already too old and tough for the purpose. Or it may be that they were priding themselves on their high moral standards, but I doubt this very much.</p>
212	<p>The occasional rape, which we punish severely if we choose to make it public.</p> <p>...“We’ve had another suicide attempt among the Premarital Preparatory students at Rubies,” said Aunt Lise, tucking back a wandering strand of hair. She had removed the ungainly babushka-like head covering we are obliged to wear in public to avoid inflaming men, although the idea of any men being inflamed either by Aunt Lise, impressive of profile but alarmingly puckered, or by me, with my greying thatchery and sack-of-potatoes body, is so ludicrous that it hardly needs articulating.</p> <p>Not a suicide; not again, I thought. But Aunt Lise had said attempt, which meant that the suicide had not succeeded. There is always an inquiry when they do succeed, and fingers are pointed at Ardua Hall. Inappropriate mate selection is the usual accusation—we at the Hall being responsible for making the first cut, since we hold the Bloodlines information. Opinions vary, however, as to what is in fact appropriate.</p> <p>“What was it this time? Anti-anxiety medication overdose? I wish the Wives wouldn’t leave those pills strewn around where anyone can get hold of them. Those, and the opiates: such a temptation. Or did she try to hang herself?”</p> <p>“Not hanging,” said Aunt Lise. “She attempted to slash her wrists with the secateurs. The ones I use for the flower-arranging.”</p> <p>“That’s direct, at any rate,” I said. “What happened then?”</p> <p>“Well, she didn’t slash very deeply. Though there was a lot of blood, and a certain amount</p>

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	<p>of... noise.”</p> <p>“Ah.” By noise, she meant screaming: so unladylike. “And then?”</p> <p>...“She says she will try it again, if... unless there’s a change in plan.”</p> <p>“Change in plan?” I knew what she meant, but it’s best to require clarity.</p> <p>“Unless the wedding is called off,” said Aunt Lise.</p> <p>“We have counsellors,” I said. “They’ve done their job?”</p> <p>...“She says she’s not afraid of dying. It’s living she objects to. Under the circumstances.”</p> <p>...“Penises,” I said thoughtfully. “Them again.” In attempted suicides of young girls, this is often the case. Perhaps we need to change our educational curriculum, I thought: less fear-mongering, fewer centaur-like ravishers and male genitalia bursting into flame. But if we were to put too much emphasis on the theoretical delights of sex, the result would almost certainly be curiosity and experimentation, followed by moral degeneracy and public stonings. “No chance she might be brought to see the item in question as a means to an end? As a prelude to babies?”</p>
221	<p>After Becka cut her wrist with the secateurs and bled on the Shasta daisies and was taken to the hospital, I was very worried about her: would she recover, would she be punished?</p>
223	<p>I lay in bed that night with the three photographs of the eligible men floating in the darkness before my eyes. I pictured each one of them on top of me—for that is where they would be—trying to shove his loathsome appendage into my stone-cold body.</p>
225	<p>Meanwhile, I was pondering other actions I might take. There were the French-style flower-arranging secateurs, like the ones Becka had used—Paula had some of those—but they were in the garden shed, which was locked. I’d heard of a girl who’d hanged herself with her bathrobe sash to avoid a marriage. Vera had told the story the year before, while the other two Marthas made sad faces and shook their heads.</p> <p>“Suicide is a failure of faith,” Zilla said.</p> <p>...There was bleach, but it was kept in the kitchen, as were knives; and the Marthas—being no fools and having eyes in the backs of their heads—were alert to my desperation.</p>
226	<p>It reached the bed where I was lying paralyzed with horror, and also naked—you had to be naked, or at least naked enough, said Shunammite.</p>
229	<p>As the days ticked past, I became more desperate. Where was the exit? I had no gun, I had no lethal pills. I remembered a story—circulated by Shunammite at school—about someone’s Handmaid who had swallowed drain cleaner.</p> <p>“The whole bottom part of her face came off,” Shunammite had whispered with delight. “It just... dissolved! It was, like, fizzing!” I hadn’t believed her at the time, though now I did. A bathtub filled with water? But I would gasp and splutter and come up for air, and I couldn’t attach a stone to myself in the bath, unlike in a lake or a river or the sea.</p> <p>...These scenarios were fantasies, of course. Underneath this web-spinning, I knew I could never kill myself or murder anyone. I remembered Becka’s fierce expression when she’d slashed her wrist: she’d been serious about it, she’d really been prepared to die. She was strong in a way that I was not. I would never have her resolve.</p>
241	<p>“Becka!” I said. I’d last seen her at Aunt Lise’s flower-arranging class with blood spurting out of her cut wrist. Her face had been very pale then, and resolved, and forlorn. She looked much better now.</p>

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260	<p>“Some people say ‘God bless you.’ ”</p> <p>Neil would’ve been shocked if I’d ever said such a thing. “That would be a lie. If I don’t believe in God.”</p>
261	<p>“Is he abusing you, dear?” the redhead asked.</p> <p>The other one smiled. “Is he selling you? We can make things so much better for you.”</p>
266	<p>“And does he make you do bad things?”</p> <p>I looked stupid, so Aunt Beatrice—the taller one—said, “Does he make you have sex?” I gave the tiniest nod, as if I was ashamed of those things.</p> <p>“And does he pass you around to other men?”</p> <p>That was going too far—I couldn’t imagine Garth doing anything like that—so I shook my head no. And Aunt Beatrice said maybe he hadn’t tried that yet, but if I stayed with him he would, because that’s what men like him did—they got hold of young girls and pretended to love them, but soon enough they were selling them to whoever would pay.</p> <p>“Free love,” Aunt Beatrice said scornfully. “It’s never free. There’s always a price.”</p>
277	<p>Commander Judd had ordered in some coffee—excellent coffee of a kind not normally available; I avoided asking him how he had come by it. He added a shot of rum to his and asked if I would like some. I declined.</p>
278	<p>She’d booked an appointment with Dr. Grove, as per my orders. Then, at the appropriate moment, she’d scrambled out of the dentist’s chair, ripped her clothing, and shrieked that Grove had tried to rape her. Then, weeping distractedly, she’d staggered out into the waiting room, where Mr. William, the dental assistant, was able to witness her dishevelled appearance and ravaged state of soul.</p>
280	<p>“Was he really guilty?” he asked with mild interest.</p> <p>“Yes,” I said, “but not of that. He would not have been capable of raping Aunt Elizabeth. He was a pedophile.”</p>
282	<p>“I will leave these matters in your capable hands,” he said. “Are you sure you won’t take a drop of rum in your coffee? It helps the circulation.”</p> <p>“Maybe a teaspoon,” I said. He poured. We lifted our mugs, clinked them together.</p>
303	<p>The girl was simply shoved out the door and raped to death, then cut up like a cow by a man who’d treated her like a purchased animal when she’d been alive. No wonder she’d run away in the first place.</p>
305	<p>But Shunammite had said that her Martha had said there had been an unlawful and sinful liaison—the Handmaid and the husband had been in the habit of fornicating in his study.</p>
362	<p>One of them said, “You’re very brave, heading into Sodom.” If I hadn’t been so scared I might have laughed—the idea of Canada being Sodom was hilarious, considering how boring and ordinary it mostly was. It wasn’t like there was a non-stop countrywide orgy going on.</p>
366	<p>Despite the alcohol, the man drove well and quickly.</p>

Profanity	Count
Ass	1
Bitch	2
Fuck	16
Piss	2
Shit	19