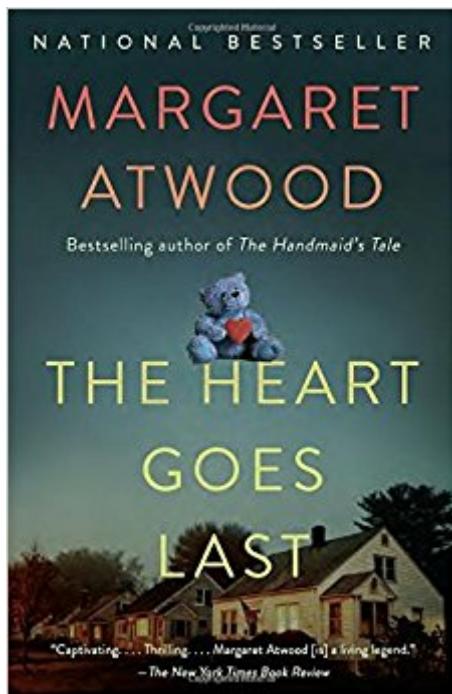


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# The Heart Goes Last: A Novel



## Synopsis

From the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Handmaid's Tale* Stan and Charmaine, a young urban couple, have been hit by job loss and bankruptcy in the midst of a nationwide economic collapse. Forced to live in their third-hand Honda, where they are vulnerable to roving gangs, they think the gated community of Consilience may be the answer to their prayers. If they sign a life contract, they'll get a job and a lovely house . . . for six months out of the year. On alternating months, residents must leave their homes and serve as inmates in the Positron prison system. At first, this seems worth it: they will have a roof over their heads and food on the table. But when a series of troubling events unfolds, Positron begins to look less like a prayer answered and more like a chilling prophecy fulfilled. *The Heart Goes Last* is a vivid, urgent vision of development and decay, freedom and surveillance, struggle and hope—and the timeless workings of the human heart. *One of the Best Books of the Year*: The Boston Globe

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Captivating. . . . Thrilling. . . . Margaret Atwood [is] a living legend.” “Quintessential Atwood. . . . The writing here is so persuasive, so crisp, that it seeps under your skin.” “An arresting perspective on the confluence of information, freedom, and security in the modern age.” “A gripping, psychologically acute portrayal of our own future gone totally wrong, and the eternal constant of flawed humanity.” “Margaret Atwood turns her effortless

world-building, deft humor and grim commentary on the depths of human hubris to the prison industrial complex, love and free will. • The Denver Post “Rare apocalyptic entertainment. . . . Not only does Atwood sketch out an all-too-possible future but she also looks to the past, tapping into archetypes from fairy tales and myth, giving the novel a resonance beyond satire.” • The Miami Herald “Another Atwood classic.” • St. Louis Post-Dispatch “Poignant. . . . Gloriously madcap. . . . You only pause in your laughter when you realise that, in its constituent parts, the world she depicts here is all too horribly plausible.” • The Guardian (London) “Engrossing.” • The Austin Chronicle “Wonderful. . . . Explores the idea of a powerful system and its discontents. . . . Atwood’s The Heart Goes Last is a riveting addition to her oeuvre.” • Electric Literature “Atwood’s creepy but entertaining vision of a possible future.” • The Washington Times “Fast-paced and funny. . . . True love ultimately endures in The Heart Goes Last, but so do the real terrors present in Atwood novels, all too often manifesting in ours.” • PopMatters “Eerily prophetic. . . . A heady blend of speculative fiction with noir undertones that is provocative, powerful and will prompt all readers to reassess which parts of their humanity are for sale.” • BookPage “Ever-inventive, astutely observant, and drollly ironic, Atwood unfurls a riotous plot. . . . This laser-sharp, hilariously campy, and swiftly flowing satire delves deeply into our desires, vices, biases, and contradictions, bringing fresh, incisive comedy to the rising tide of postapocalyptic fiction . . . in which Atwood has long been a clarion voice.” • Booklist (starred review)

Margaret Atwood, whose work has been published in thirty-five countries, is the author of more than forty books of fiction, poetry, and critical essays. In addition to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, her novels include *Cat’s Eye*, short-listed for the 1989 Booker Prize; *Alias Grace*, which won the Giller Prize in Canada and the Premio Mondello in Italy; *The Blind Assassin*, winner of the 2000 Booker Prize; *Oryx and Crake*, short-listed for the 2003 Man Booker Prize; *The Year of the Flood*; and her most recent, *MaddAddam*. She is the recipient of the Los Angeles Times Innovator Award, and lives in Toronto with the writer Graeme Gibson. [www.margaretatwood.ca](http://www.margaretatwood.ca)

Maggie is my literary goddess. I have ingested just about all the fiction she’s written with a deep and ceaseless hunger! That said, this latest book left me a bit cold. Characters didn’t strike a chord, despite their poignant dire circumstances, and I found myself skipping pages to get through to the

next plot point. What went wrong? Not having read the previous stories in the Positron series, I can't comment on how this story might or might not carry the torch for that series. I only know that I wanted the blade that cuts into our fragile and foibled human condition to go deeper than it did here. Still, I found humor and pathos in *The Heart Goes Last*. And, as usual when reading Atwood, my brain couldn't help but accelerate into the murky stratosphere of the future: when the reckoning comes, for whatever course we've set ourselves on, what will become of us? And what will we mere humans do to survive in a repugnant cosmic stewpot of our own making? Keep writing, Maggie! You inspire, enlighten, dazzle and comfort all at once.

I can't begin to tell of my disappointment in this book from one of my favorite authors. A great premis of a story in the vein of *The Handmaid's Tale* but is so poorly executed I could barely finish it. I kept waiting for it to turn around, waiting for a brilliant Atwood twist and some poetic prose to be dropped on me but it never happened. The characters are beyond dumb, there is no real hero, reluctant or otherwise (not that there even has to be but Geeze Louise I need something to latch onto here). I could have cared less about any of the characters. The villain was not remotely interesting. Please inject them all and be done with it.

Margaret Atwood is a master at creatively weaving dystopian science fiction, social commentary, and middle class angst into compelling stories you can't put down. *The Heart Goes Last* started off strong. Its setting -- a not-too-distant future where unrestrained capitalism and greed have turned America into a society that looks far more like a third world country than a superpower -- is a very real fear for many. The characters can only make bad choices in a society where there are few good choices available to the masses. But at some point, the artfully crafted story goes off the rails, with confusing and odd plot detours involving sex robots, Elvis impersonators, and references to bestiality. After sorting through all of that, you stop caring what happens to the characters in the end. For a far better dystopian novel by Atwood, try *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Alluring, yet slow to start, this novel became hard for me to put down midway through. Sexually twisted at times, I found myself pausing to consider the implications the text alludes to and realizing it wasn't so far fetched. Fully developed characters are both hard to like and difficult not to relate to. It's like seeing a shadow monster that you want to hug. You love certain characters, at times, and really dislike them, at times. You cheer for them and shake your head at them, too. Initially the text seems unrealistic, to the point I found myself mentally mocking it and picking it apart. Then I

reached a point of no return and realized I'd come to terms with its absurdities and began to even rationalize and agree with them. That's when I knew I'd bonded with the text and had to finish it. Following the patterns of disbelief and acceptance, love and hate, the novel ends in a way that is a surprise and yet it's not totally shocking or predictable. You must read it to understand. And I do recommend that you read it.

Not one of her best, but worth reading if you're a fan. Some great concepts, not fully realized. Characters are fairly flat and stereotypical. I could see this the concepts expanded and spawning a miniseries.

Stan has traveled with us in the previous three installments of the Positron series. Each installment is really reliant on the one before, although I have seen the first three installments are now packaged together. Positron is the brave new world in which people sign up for life in exchange for work, room and board. Every other month they are essentially slaves working in the upkeep of the prison, while the other month they are returned to their "real life." The company town is not a new concept in America. Migrant worker camps, company coal towns, steel cities all worked on the basic premise that the worker is part of the production package. Atwood takes the poisoning of the American dream that much further. In fact she goes much much further. This chapter is the first real indication that some places have continued: Los Vegas and Holland. Stan and Charmaine have survived a number of tests and dead ends, and now they are off to the world of the sex worker. This is the dystopia as only Atwood can write it and I almost sobbed when the chapter ended. She is able to mix in just enough of the world we know to make us take a second look and say, "well maybe this might happen." It is well worth following.

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