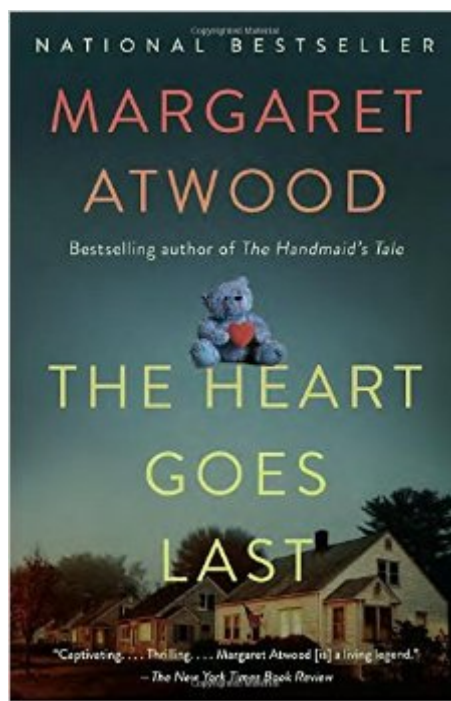


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The Heart Goes Last: A Novel



Synopsis

One of the Best Books of the Year: The Boston Globe 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Margaret Atwood's latest book is a reworking of her Positron eBook series that she began in 2012 with *I'M STARVED FOR YOU*. The five novellas have been reportedly edited and retitled into this novel. Since I haven't read them, I am unable to comment on any of the changes that she made. If you are an Atwood fan, however, this is a must-read addition to her oeuvre. It's characteristic Atwood--bleak, with darkly comedic touches. In a grim near-future, unemployment rates are at an all-time high, and morale is at a fearsome low in this "rust-bucket" landscape. Charmaine and Stan are living in their car, trying to ward off the roving bands of criminals and solitary vandals, not to mention the mosquitos! Charmaine once had a solid job as a hospitality coordinator at the Ruby

Slippers Retirement chain, and Stan worked in quality control at Dimple Robotics. But, the bottom has fallen out on the economy, and Stan has lost his job; Charmaine makes a bare income at a bar called PixelDust. Moreover, the once-happy couple are growing distant from one another. There's a way out of this poverty. The think-tankers have begun a program to banish hardship and crime--if you can be accepted into their Positron Project. They offer housing in a place not dissimilar to a "Pleasantville" type of dwelling/neighborhood. You live in their adult doll houses every other month, and on alternate months you stay in the "Positron" prison, which is supposed to be an upbeat, self-sustaining place free of violent criminals. Everyone has a job on the inside and the outside in the twin town of Consilience/Positron, and the promise of safety is more or less guaranteed.

If Positron Episode Three was a placeholder, Episode Four is a rollercoaster, hurtling the reader towards the climax of this dystopian satire. Stan has made contact with the underground, both inside and outside Positron, as friendly a bunch of working stiffs as you'll ever meet and Charmaine is trying out her twin roles of grieving widow and coerced murderess. Along the way we are introduced to sexbots and finally learn why the ladies are knitting those endless, sweet, blue bears. Atwood riffs a bit in this section on the tried and true parody that is gender politics and the reader does wonder a bit what market there is for these fancy toys in the economic Armageddon Atwood described in the previous installments, but Atwood fiddling is better than most writing full bore so I'm willing to believe that all of these disparate elements can fit together. In Episode Four, Atwood's themes become most apparent. Atwood is obsessed not only with mortal evil, but with venal evil and delineating just where to draw the line when little evil transforms into big evil. Is it cumulative? Repetitive? Is it the existence of both the mortal and the venal that undoes us as individuals and as a species? Our willingness to overlook the venal or our unwillingness to look closely at our own harmless pleasures and little vices? All great questions and Atwood doesn't provide easy answers or very hopeful ones. No sweeping redemption here, but there is the everyday grace of personal revelation and forgiveness hidden in the story like change in a couch cushion. Grace notes of compassion in a sea of bile.

I received this ARC from NetGalley in exchange for my honest review. Well Atwood does it again. She somehow manages to create a world that both intrigues me and terrifies me. Like many people, Stan and Charmaine lost everything with the great economic collapse. Before the collapse, they are newly married and living paycheck to paycheck. Then the collapse happens and they lose their jobs, along with their house. Charmaine works a part time job that barely feeds them, so they live in their

car and dumpster dive for food. Then what seems like a miracle: they are offered a place in Positron, a society where the citizens actually take turns living in prison. It's all very weird and kind of crazy, but I have to admit that I would be tempted too. It's this supposed paradise, where they get a regular paycheck and a house and a job. Even when they take their turns in prison, it doesn't really seem like jail. The food is amazing and they all have their duties and stations. One month, they are in prison and the next month, they return to their house where they live as a married couple. During the time when they are in prison, another married couple lives in their home. Trouble arises when Charmaine starts having sex with the married man who lives in her house while she isn't there. Okay, so the world Atwood built is disturbing and chilling. In the synopsis, it is described as hilarious as well. I think this was supposed to be a dark comedy, but I didn't really find much funny about it. It was hard to warm up to either one of the main characters. I couldn't tell if they loved each other or not. Charmaine is having an affair with the married man who lives in her house when she is in prison.

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