

"The Testaments"

The testaments

Margaret Atwood.

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Atwood, Margaret, 1939-

The testaments

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The Testaments- Atwood

Some Concerns: graphic scenes of child molestation, child sex

XIV: AKDUA HALL

10. ...sed by that, and said she was sure we would both get through the sex part and not make a fuss. We would follow Aunt Lise's instructio...

XVI: PEARL GIRLS

11. ...id, 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.
12. ...much he valued you. You're lucky he sold you to us and not some sex ring," said Aunt Beatrice. "He wanted a lot of money, but I got...

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He snapped off his white stretchy sanitary gloves and washed his hands at the sink, which was behind my back.

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.

I froze, in shock. So it was all true then, about men and their ram-paging, 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.

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.

"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.

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.

"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."

I walked out of the room, feeling sick to my stomach. Mr. William was in the waiting room, his unobtrusive thirty-year-old face impassive. He held out a bowl with new pink and blue toothbrushes in it. I knew enough to take a pink one.

Starred Review The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is a prisoner's memoir written in shock, despair, and longing by a woman who has been hijacked from her life and enslaved in a tyrannical theocracy on a

poisoned planet where human fertility is imperiled. Margaret Atwood's concussive and prescient novel remains electrifying and appallingly relevant in the Trump era, both on the page and in its Emmy-winning television adaptation. In her avidly awaited sequel, Atwood returns to Gilead, 15 years after the Handmaid called Offred recorded her indelible experiences. Readers will again enter a dystopia of eerie orderliness as women under ruthless surveillance, their social status indicated by cumbersome, color-coded uniforms, are forced into dehumanizing rituals of sex and punishment. One key character returns, the formidable Aunt Lydia. But in this very different novel, three women tell their stories, the lens widens so that Gilead is seen from the outside, and the focus is not only on men oppressing women, but also on women wielding power. The result is a shrewdly suspenseful tale of survival and resistance. And Atwood's wit is phosphorescent. In Gilead, a university's libraries have been claimed by the elite for their headquarters, and deep in her inner sanctum among the "Forbidden World Literature" collection Aunt Lydia risks all to write her testament. We learn that she emerged from an abusive childhood to become a family judge until she and all other professional women were rounded up and taken to a stadium-turned-concentration-camp in some of the novel's most harrowing scenes. Aunt Lydia's tenacity and Machiavellianism ultimately serve her well as the self-described "alpha hen" among the Aunts charged with intimidating and indoctrinating young women. Because the men don't want to be bothered with "the petty details of the female sphere," as she sardonically explains, Aunt Lydia becomes a force unto herself. Two young women provide the other testaments. Agnes, the daughter of a prominent Commander in Gilead, is about to be forced by her conniving stepmother into an arranged marriage at age 13. Daisy, 16, has grown up in Canada, where she has participated in demonstrations against Gilead. Why and how these three converge propels the high-velocity plot and its dramatic and daring missions and quests. And what a great gust of fresh air a teenager's sarcastic irreverence is. Throughout Atwood's extraordinarily creative, brilliantly grounded, mordantly funny, and eviscerating oeuvre women are portrayed as complex, diabolical, fiery, and competitive. Warriors for good and ill. Finding that subversive female energy flowing molten beneath the surface of chilling Gilead is positively therapeutic. For all the wrenching violence and heart-pounding action in *The Testaments*, which is written in the mode of Atwood's astutely speculative MaddAddam trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), *MaddAddam* (2013)—it is the droll and righteous commentary that sets this novel alight. Both Gilead novels face head-on the horrors of tyranny and find some glimmer of hope in the redemptive act of bearing witness, a courageous expression of dissent and declaration of freedom in all its hectic and essential splendor. Copyright 2019 Booklist Reviews.