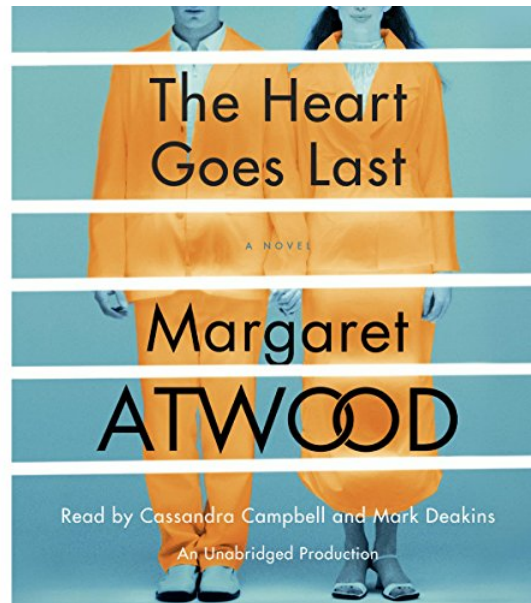
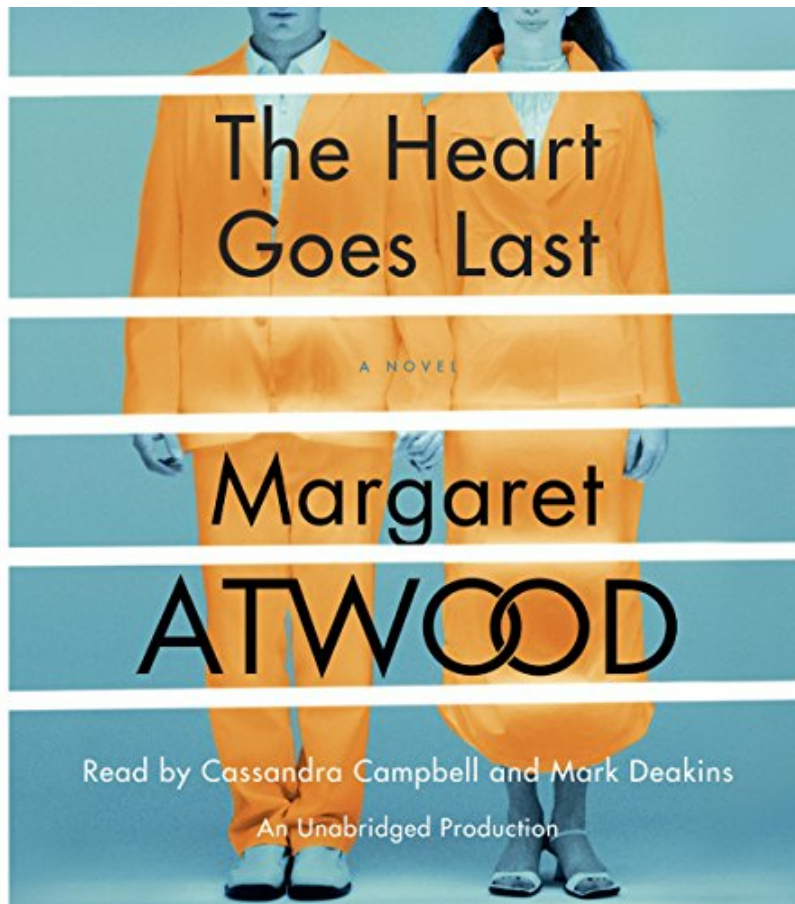


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THE HEART GOES LAST: A NOVEL BY MARGARET ATWOOD PDF

Margaret Atwood puts the human heart to the ultimate test in an utterly brilliant new novel that is as visionary as *The Handmaid's Tale* and as richly imagined as *The Blind Assassin*.

Stan and Charmaine are a married couple trying to stay afloat in the midst of an economic and social collapse. Job loss has forced them to live in their car, leaving them vulnerable to roving gangs. They desperately need to turn their situation around - and fast. The Positron Project in the town of Consilience seems to be the answer to their prayers. No one is unemployed, and everyone gets a comfortable, clean house to live in...for six months out of the year. On alternating months, residents of Consilience must leave their homes and function as inmates in the Positron prison system. Once their month of service in the prison is completed, they can return to their "civilian" homes.

At first this doesn't seem like too much of a sacrifice to make in order to have a roof over one's head and food to eat. But when Charmaine becomes romantically involved with the man who lives in their house during the months when she and Stan are in the prison, a series of troubling events unfolds, putting Stan's life in danger. With each passing day, Positron looks less like a prayer answered and more like a chilling prophecy fulfilled.

- Sales Rank: #3629 in Audible
- Published on: 2015-09-29
- Released on: 2015-09-29
- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 730 minutes

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The previously published Positron novellas collected into a novel

By "switterbug" Betsey Van Horn

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. Stan and Charmaine decide to go ahead with it, even though Stan's brother, Conor, a rogue outsider, warns them against getting involved.

Stan scores a job inside the prison supervising the Positron chicken farm, and Charmaine's duties are top-secret as the Medical Administrator. (Sometimes she is referred to as Medication Administrator, which would be better if corrected before the published edition.) On rotating months, while living in the house that they alternate with another couple, Stan is a scooter mechanic (nobody has cars anymore--they ride around on scooters) and Charmaine works at a bakery. The only cars you see are the black, looming, ominous Surveillance cars that patrol the area.

So, this is the set-up. But, as Atwood fans know all too well, there's a sinister gravity beneath the shiny new lifestyle. As a reader, I was reminded of the illusion of unanimity inherent in groupthink, such as explored in Orwell's 1984. Underneath the townspeople's smiles, gratitude, and sense of security lurks a barely suppressed disquiet, which ineluctably leads to some acting out. I could almost taste the barely contained insurrection, and the dangers to come.

In typical Atwood fashion--maybe a little too predictable--the illusions are gradually peeled away, and our two protagonists are surrounded by peril. If you are new to Atwood, perhaps the book will be full of surprises, but if you are a veteran of her work, you can anticipate some of her recycled tropes. Also, the last 100 or so pages plunged into Vegas kitsch, which created a different timbre. The dark menace morphed into a gaudy one, and, for me, dampened the elemental dread. Fortunately, through her precision writing, pulsing pace, and progressive plot, the suspense prevails, but I was less invested in the foreseeable outcome.

25 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

"the more he knows about humanity, the less he likes it."

By Amelia Gremelspacher

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.

34 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Atwood at Her Blackest, Biting, Bile Filled Best

By Anastasia McPherson

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. Gracenotes of compassion in a sea of bile.

At points in the work entire so far, I felt that Atwood was treading her familiar grounds and themes in ways that didn't always make sense in terms of the world building (take one part consumer catastrophe and mix with with one part late capitalist greed and excess, add a dash of gender division at levels both political and personal and blend well with a dash of zany impossibilities) but I love Atwood's obsessions even when she is mixing up a pork cake. Atwood may not have much hope for us as a whole, but she still cares passionately and her dissection of the parts of our nature we ignore to our peril is keen to say the very least. I'll be buying all of the remaining installments as soon as they're released.

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