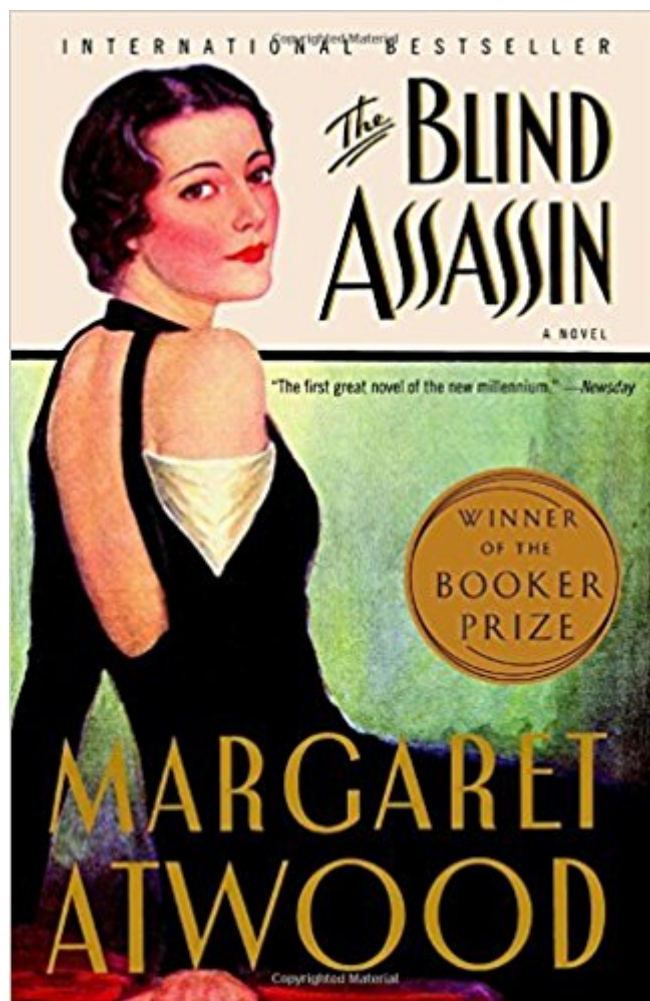


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# The Blind Assassin: A Novel



## Synopsis

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Handmaid's Tale* WINNER OF THE BOOKER PRIZE In *The Blind Assassin*, Margaret Atwood weaves together strands of gothic suspense, romance, and science fiction into one utterly spellbinding narrative. The novel begins with the mysterious death of a possible suicide of a young woman named Laura Chase in 1945. Decades later, Laura's sister Iris recounts her memories of their childhood, and of the dramatic deaths that have punctuated their wealthy, eccentric family's history. Intertwined with Iris's account are chapters from the scandalous novel that made Laura famous, in which two illicit lovers amuse each other by spinning a tale of a blind killer on a distant planet. These richly layered stories-within-stories gradually illuminate the secrets that have long haunted the Chase family, coming together in a brilliant and astonishing final twist.

## Book Information

Paperback: 521 pages

Publisher: Anchor (August 28, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385720955

ISBN-13: 978-0385720953

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 669 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #14,781 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > Garden Design #501 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary #1559 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical

## Customer Reviews

*The Blind Assassin* is a tale of two sisters, one of whom dies under ambiguous circumstances in the opening pages. The survivor, Iris Chase Griffen, initially seems a little cold-blooded about this death in the family. But as Margaret Atwood's most ambitious work unfolds--a tricky process, in fact, with several nested narratives and even an entire novel-within-a-novel--we're reminded of just how complicated the familial game of hide-and-seek can be: What had she been thinking of as the car sailed off the bridge, then hung suspended in the afternoon sunlight, glinting like a dragonfly, for that one instant of held breath before the plummet? Of Alex, of Richard, of bad faith, of our father and his wreckage; of God, perhaps, and her fatal, triangular bargain. Meanwhile, Atwood immediately

launches into an excerpt from Laura Chase's novel, *The Blind Assassin*, posthumously published in 1947. In this double-decker concoction, a wealthy woman dabbles in blue-collar passion, even as her lover regales her with a series of science-fictional parables. Complicated? You bet. But the author puts all this variegation to good use, taking expert measure of our capacity for self-delusion and complicity, not to mention desolation. Almost everybody in her sprawling narrative manages to--or prefers to--overlook what's in plain sight. And memory isn't much of a salve either, as Iris points out: "Nothing is more difficult than to understand the dead, I've found; but nothing is more dangerous than to ignore them." Yet Atwood never succumbs to postmodern cynicism, or modish contempt for her characters. On the contrary, she's capable of great tenderness, and as we immerse ourselves in Iris's spliced-in memoir, it's clear that this buttoned-up socialite has been anything but blind to the chaos surrounding her. --Darya Silver --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Family secrets, sibling rivalry, political chicanery and social unrest, promises and betrayals, "loss and regret and memory and yearning" are the themes of Atwood's brilliant new novel, whose subtitle might read: *The Fall of the House of Chase*. Justly praised for her ability to suggest the complexity of individual lives against the backdrop of Canadian history, Atwood here plays out a spellbinding family saga intimately affected by WWI, the Depression and Communist witch-hunts, but the final tragedy is equally the result of human frailty, greed and passion. Octogenarian narrator Iris Chase Griffen is moribund from a heart ailment as she reflects on the events following the suicide in 1945 of her fey, unworldly 25-year-old sister, Laura, and of the posthumous publication of Laura's novel, called "The Blind Assassin." Iris's voice is dour, irreverent, witty and cynical. It is mesmerizingly immediate. When her narration gives way to conversations between two people collaborating on a science fiction novel, we assume that we are reading the genesis of Laura's tale. The voices are those of an unidentified young woman from a wealthy family and her lover, a hack writer and socialist agitator on the run from the law; the lurid fantasy they concoct between bouts of lovemaking constitutes a novel-within-a-novel. Issues of sexual obsession, political tyranny, social justice and class disparity are addressed within the potboiler SF, which features gruesome sacrifices, mutilated body parts and corrupt, barbaric leaders. Despite subtle clues, the reader is more than halfway through Atwood's tour de force before it becomes clear that things are not what they seem. Meanwhile, flashbacks illuminate the Chase family history. In addition to being psychically burdened at age nine by her mother's deathbed adjuration to take care of her younger sibling, naïve Iris at age 18 is literally sold into marriage to a ruthless 35-year-old industrialist by her

father, a woolly-minded idealist who thinks more about saving the family name and protecting the workers in his button factories than his daughter's happiness. Atwood's pungent social commentary rings chords on the ways women are used by men, and how the power that wealth confers can be used as a deadly weapon. Her microscopic observation transforms details into arresting metaphors, often infused with wry, pithy humor. As she adroitly juggles three plot lines, Atwood's inventiveness achieves a tensile energy. The alternating stories never slacken the pace; on the contrary, one reads each segment breathlessly, eager to get back to the other. In sheer storytelling bravado, Atwood here surpasses even *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace*. BOMC main selection; author tour. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Beautifully written, but with a sort of preciousness that made me glad to see the end of the book. I really am impressed by Atwood's abilities, but in the end, perhaps just a bit overly stylized. I really do assume it is all a matter of taste, as she really is a major writer...just not for me...but she just might really ring your chimes. I am tempted to rate it higher just for Atwood's beautiful prose.

How to describe? Saying I loved this book isn't enough, but any analysis I could offer would be pale. After I turned the last page I had to take a break from starting a new book for several days because all the samples I surveyed did not grab me like what I had just finished. Beyond the alternating stories, which dovetail very well, the words are beautifully selected, and never tedious. I really cared about the characters, and no one is pure protagonist or the antithesis. Simply, Margaret Atwood is in a league of her own.

I selected this book as a literary break from my usual diet of Le Carre and other spy novels, my choice largely based on its Booker award status. This is a long book, and it took me a long time to get into it. Some of the literary devices are not fully revealed until the last third, and they were challenging to follow early on. But stick with it. You'll be rewarded with fabulous writing and a thought-provoking finish. Now back to my thrillers, but I'll be looking for another book by this author soon.

It's hard to summarize such a long and complex book, but the short version is that it's actually three stories in one. The first is about a woman named Iris who, in present day, looks back on her life, including her marriage to wealthy man and her complicated

relationship with her sister, who died as a young woman. The second is the vivid recreation of Iris's past, itself. The third is a book written by Iris's tragically misunderstood sister whose death serves as an unspoken catalyst for the entire story. If I thought summarizing the book up was hard, I can say that telling you why I loved this book is equally difficult. It's no secret that Atwood has a way with words and is able to weave a complex story with complete ease, but she is also able to foster empathy for misunderstood characters. Atwood manages to recreate a world where the suppression of women is commonplace, but not evil, while at the same time punctuating the story with little rebellions by strong women. Feminism in the 1930s was of a very different variety than today and Atwood's ability to capture both the reality of the times and the subtle ways women rebelled is nothing short of stunning.

In *The Blind Assassin*, Margaret Atwood weaves a large number of narratives together to tell one story of love and loss. Each story feeds off of the other in an organic way, all building to a very somber conclusion. The main character of this novel is Iris Griffen, an elderly woman nearing the end of her life. The first story is how she lives in the modern age (the 1990's). The second is the biography she's writing about her early life with her family, particularly her sister Laura. Laura killed herself in 1945, and had a novel published posthumously, the titular 'the Blind Assassin'. This novel is the third story, detailing a love affair between a rich woman unsatisfied with her life and a communist-sympathizing pulp fiction writer. During the affair, he tells the woman a made up love story about planet Zyrcon. This is the actual 'blind assassin' story. All four of these tales feed into the life story of Iris Griffen. While Iris is certainly a sympathetic protagonist, the real star of this novel is Atwood's prose. This book is filled with wry, humorous descriptions of life and people, and she excels at being able to give each character a unique voice. I can certainly see why this won the Booker prize.

I just turned the last page of Margaret Atwood's *Blind Assassin*. My heart is throbbing. My mind stretches into the lives and the future of the story that continues in the nowhere space of everywhere where great novels continue to unfold. I feel like my perceptions and appreciations of people I know and am yet to meet are deeper, more clear and more vivid. Atwood expanded my heart and mind with this amazing and engrossing book. I tried to limit myself to a few pages a day to extend the duration of this novel in my active life. I haven't done that with a book in many years. Now I've read it. I hope you will too. Here's a line that lingers - one of many treasures. "They stuffed

themselves full of technicolor meat and all the technicolor food they could get, as if there was no tomorrow. But there was a tomorrow, there was nothing but a tomorrow. It was yesterday that had vanished." Brava, Margaret Atwood! and thank you. Joanna Poppink, Los Angeles psychotherapist in private practice. author of Healing Your Hungry Heart: recovering from your eating disorder.

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