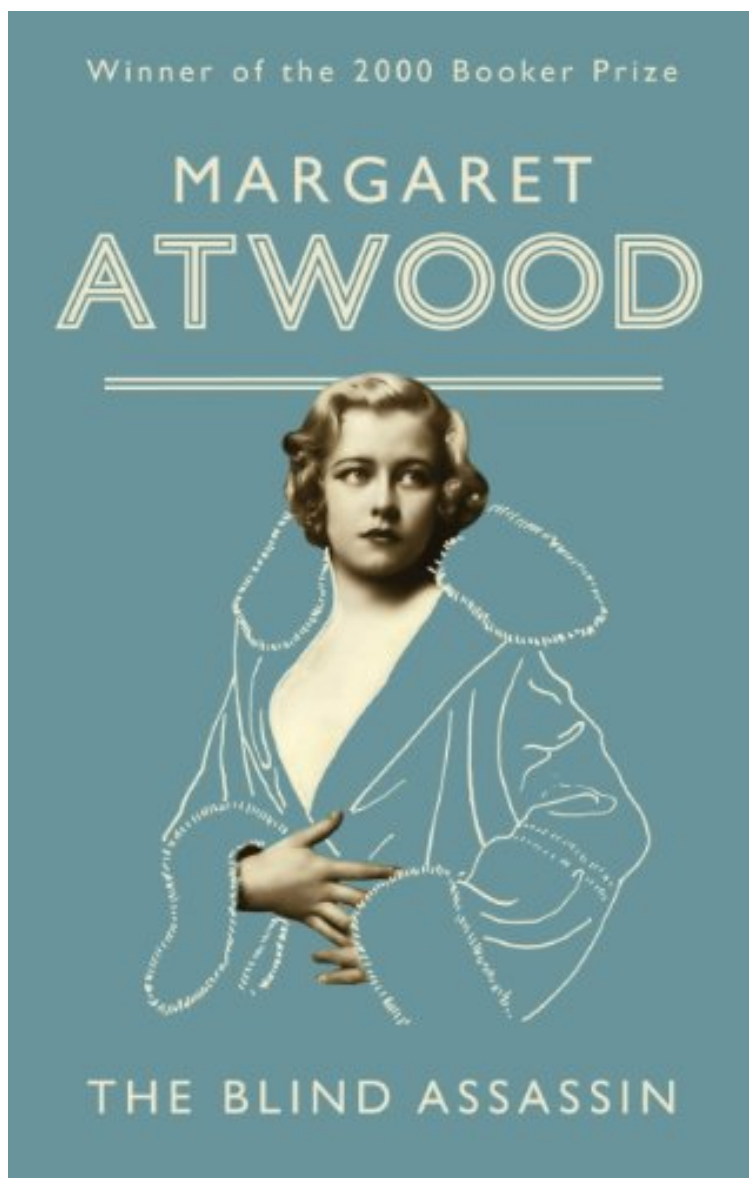


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The Blind Assassin (English Edition)



Par Margaret Atwood
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWinner of the Man Booker PrizeBy the author of The Handmaid's Tale and Alias GraceLaura Chase's older sister Iris, married at eighteen to a politically prominent industrialist but now poor and eighty-two, is living in Port Ticonderoga, a town dominated by their once-prosperous family before the First War. While coping with her unreliable body, Iris reflects on her far from exemplary life, in particular the events surrounding her sister's tragic death. Chief among these was the publication of *The Blind Assassin*, a novel which earned the dead Laura Chase not only notoriety but also a devoted cult following. Sexually explicit for its time, *The Blind Assassin* describes a risky affair in the turbulent thirties between a wealthy young woman and a man on the run. During their secret meetings in rented rooms, the lovers

concoct a pulp fantasy set on Planet Zycron. As the invented story twists through love and sacrifice and betrayal, so does the real one; while events in both move closer to war and catastrophe. By turns lyrical, outrageous, formidable, compelling and funny, this is a novel filled with deep humour and dark drama.

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

Extrait THE BRIDGET

Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge. The bridge was being repaired: she went right through the Danger sign. The car fell a hundred feet into the ravine, smashing through the treetops feathery with new leaves, then burst into flames and rolled down into the shallow creek at the bottom. Chunks of the bridge fell on top of it. Nothing much was left of her but charred smithereens. I was informed of the accident by a policeman: the car was mine, and they'd traced the licence. His tone was respectful: no doubt he recognized Richards name. He said the tires may have caught on a streetcar track or the brakes may have failed, but he also felt bound to inform me that two witnesses a retired lawyer and a bank teller, dependable people had claimed to have seen the whole thing. They'd said Laura had turned the car sharply and deliberately, and had plunged off the bridge with no more fuss than stepping off a curb. They'd noticed her hands on the wheel because of the white gloves she'd been wearing. It wasn't the brakes, I thought. She had her reasons. Not that they were ever the same as anybody else's reasons. She was completely ruthless in that way. I suppose you want someone to identify her, I said. I'll come down as soon as I can. I could hear the calmness of my own voice, as if from a distance. In reality I could barely get the words out; my mouth was numb, my entire face was rigid with pain. I felt as if I'd been to the dentist. I was furious with Laura for what she'd done, but also with the policeman for implying that she'd done it. A hot wind was blowing around my head, the strands of my hair lifting and swirling in it, like ink spilled in water. I'm afraid there will be an inquest, Mrs. Griffen, he said. Naturally, I said. But it was an accident. My sister was never a good driver. I could picture the smooth oval of Laura's face, her neatly pinned chignon, the dress she would have been wearing: a shirtwaist with a small rounded collar, in a sober colour navy blue or steel grey or hospital-corridor green. Penitential colours less like something she'd chosen to put on than like something she'd been locked up in. Her solemn half-smile; the amazed lift of her eyebrows, as if she were admiring the view. The white gloves: a Pontius Pilate gesture. She was washing her hands of me. Of all of us. 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. Or of the stack of cheap school exercise books that she must have hidden that very morning, in the bureau drawer where I kept my stockings, knowing I would be the one to find them. When the policeman had gone I went upstairs to change. To visit the morgue I would need gloves, and a hat with a veil. Something to cover the eyes. There might be reporters. I would have to call a taxi. Also I ought to warn Richard, at his office: he would wish to have a statement of grief prepared. I went into my dressing room: I would need black, and a handkerchief. I opened the drawer, I saw the notebooks. I undid the crisscross of kitchen string that tied them together. I noticed that my teeth were chattering, and that I was cold all over. I must be in shock, I decided. What I remembered then was Reenie, from when we were little. It was Reenie who'd done the bandaging, of scrapes and cuts and minor injuries: Mother might be

resting, or doing good deeds elsewhere, but Reenie was always there. Shed scoop us up and sit us on the white enamel kitchen table, alongside the pie dough she was rolling out or the chicken she was cutting up or the fish she was gutting, and give us a lump of brown sugar to get us to close our mouths. Tell me where it hurts, shed say. Stop howling. Just calm down and show me where. But some people cant tell where it hurts. They cant calm down. They cant ever stop howling. From the Hardcover edition.