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## The testaments offered

The Testaments by Margaret Atwood, joint winner of the Booker Prize 2019, was eagerly anticipated despite a high bar having already been set by its popular predecessor The Handmaid's Tale, which encapsulated the potential consequences of suppressing women. The handmaid Offred, in her iconic white veil and red dress, became a symbol of feminism now emulated by red-dressed protestors fighting for abortion rights or for proper recognition of the MeToo movement. Through Offred's limited narrative, Atwood provided a wake-up call for society to realise how endangered the female identity could become if not empowered with their own voices. What makes The Testaments so compelling is that it acknowledges the societal changes of this era, and Atwood adjusts her narrative tone accordingly. Multiple narratives of different characters allow the setting of Gilead to be expanded and seen through many perspectives. It is still the repressive regime of totalitarianism that Offred initially introduced us to – however, as Atwood expresses in her blurb: "history does not repeat itself – but it rhymes". Unlike its prequel, The Testaments introduces us to three very different women who are destroying this regime from within. Unlike Offred's hopeless, defeatist nature of acceptance, these opinionated women plot and scheme their way against the status quo. Due to their efforts, a girl named Daisy is smuggled into Gilead to collect incriminating evidence, to thereby exploit Gilead's barbaric ways in a global cry for help. Interestingly, Daisy is the only narrative character to be an outsider – she lives in a world sheltered from the misogynistic threats of Gilead, where she is free to form her own opinions and sense of identity. As she passionately conveys, 'people should stand up against injustice', and she observes how 'Handmaids were forced to get pregnant like cows, except that cows had a better deal.' Having a narrative voice commenting on Gilead's flaws from the outside opens the reader's eyes to the sheer horror experienced by the women trapped within. Daisy's mere existence bursts the bubble of Gilead. She symbolises the freedom all people ought to have, thereby telling readers of the world what Offred never had the courage to say: there is hope. There is life beyond injustice and oppression. She answers the question that Offred felt incapable of answering. However, readers may believe that we were never meant to find an answer. The mystery behind Offred's fate in The Handmaid's Tale has inspired people to determine their own destiny, as feminist activism in recent years has shown. Therefore, by providing an eventual answer to Offred's dilemma, Atwood has taken that sense of control away from readers – just like the totalitarianism of Gilead, there is always one group or one person in charge of everything, thereby rendering individual hopes and expectations irrelevant. Atwood does this by falling into the tropes of young adult dystopian literature. This genre conventionally portrays a rebellious teenager as the hero who overthrows the 'big bad government'. Daisy could easily be compared to the likes of Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games or Tris Prior from Divergent. Her naïve, raw anger is evidently conveyed through her narration that naturally defies the judgement of her elders – at one point, she 'stomped off to my room and slammed the door. They couldn't make me.' In today's society, young people's voices are at the forefront of the news and media, so Atwood's creative decision to include Daisy as the book's hero was a relevant and necessary one. However, Daisy would have made a more convincing impact if she was portrayed in a more mature manner, rather than a rebellious, entitled stereotype. Young people are capable of change just like the people that came before them, and deserve more credit. Orix Davey Från förlaget: I slutscenen av Tjänarinans berättelse stiger Offred in i skåpbilen efter att ha anklagats av Anföraren och hans hustru. Vart hon förs vet ingen. I sin alldeles nyskrivna fortsättning på Tjänarinans berättelse, Gileads dottrar, kommer Margaret Atwood formodligen att avslöja vad som hände med Offred. Så här säger hon i ett pressmeddelande: "Kära bokläsare. Allt ni frågat mig om Gilead och hur den världen är uppbyggd har tjänat som inspiration för denna roman. Fast inte bara. Den andra inspirationskällan är den värld vi lever i idag." Sedan Tjänarinans berättelse gavs ut 1985 har Atwoods framtidsvision bara ökat i betydelse och givit upphov till kvinnors protester över hela världen, inte minst efter valet av Donald Trump till Amerikas president. Romanen fick också nytt liv genom den prisbelönade och populära tv-serien The Handmaid's Tale med Elisabeth Moss i huvudrollen. Gileads dottrar utspelas femton år efter Tjänarinans berättelse och utgår från tre andra kvinnor som berättar om sina liv i den kristna fundamentalistiska staten Gilead. Boken ges ut samtidigt som det engelska originalet. Det är svårt att skriva en uppföljare. Ännu svårare att skriva en uppföljare till en roman som har fått otroligt mycket beröm. Och som dessutom har gjorts till en TV-serie som även den har blivit rosad. Det har nu också gått 35 år sedan The Handmaid's Tale kom ut. The Testaments är ingen direkt fortsättning på Handmaid's Tale. Vi får inte veta vad som händer direkt efter. Det är nog lika bra att vara inställ på det. På det sättet är det ju inte heller döl 2 i en serie. Men jag har svårt att se att någon läser The Testaments utan att först ha läst Handmaid's Tale. The Testaments handlar mer om världen Gilead. Om man efter att ha läst Handmaid's Tale är nyfiken på att veta mer om Gilead då ska man läsa Testaments. Men om man, som sagt, vill veta vad som händer Offred, nej, då får man inte svaret här (åtminstone inte det direkta svaret). Jag kände mig rätt tveksam de första 100 sidorna. Det kändes inte som att det var en riktig berättelse utan mer som lösa anteckningar om olika öden innanför och utanför Gilead. Men sakt men säkert blev jag mer övertygad. Jag blir trots allt intresserad av de olika karaktärerna. Särskilt Aunt Lydia. Hennes perspektiv gör nog hela boken. Tyvärr håller inte själva berättelsen. Jag vill inte avslöja för mycket, men jag får inte ihop intrigen ordentligt. Det känns så osannolikt att motsändrörelsen skulle agera på det här sättet. Vissa saker är dessutom så förutsägbara att man bara väntar på att det ska hända. Det blir liksom inget avslöjande i det. Sammantaget blir jag besviken. Men jag tror det beror på att jag hade orimligt höga förväntningar på boken. Det är svårt med uppföljare som sagt. Nu måste jag dessutom säga att jag läste om Handmaid's Tale i höstas efter att ha sett TV-serien och då blev även den boken lite av en besvikelse med tanke på hur otroligt höga tankar jag hade om den. Boken får en svag fyra av mig. Här finns en smakbit från boken. Ladies in reduced circumstances, that is what we are now. The circumstances have been reduced; for those of us who still have circumstances. Offred comparing deprivation to pauperization. [1] Offred in the graphic novel. 33[2] (The Handmaid's Tale)49-50 (The Testaments) Offred is the main protagonist of The Handmaid's Tale (Novel). She is a woman in her thirties who is forced to work as a Handmaid in the early years of the Republic of Gilead, due to the fact she is still capable of bearing children. Offred recounts her life - before, during and after the creation of Gilead - to an unseen audience; it is revealed at the end of the novel that she has recorded her story on a series of tapes. Offred's final fate is left ambiguous. She is the former wife of Luke and the mother of a young daughter; she later begins a relationship with a Guardian named Nick, whom she develops romantic feelings for. Since Offred gave birth to at least one more child after the events of the (first) novel, she is speculated to be identical to the unnamed mother of Agnes and Nicole, two half-sisters (and narrators) from The Testaments novel[3]. Unlike in the film adaptations, her real name is never revealed. Due to an assumed (but actually coincidental) "clue" in the text, the author later welcomed readers to name Offred June "if they wish". Profile[] Appearance[] She is described as wearing the standard handmaid's uniform, saying that red does not suit her[5]. "My hair is long now, untrimmed. I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse[6]. I am thirty-three years old. I have brown hair, I stand five seven without shoes[7]. Personality[] Story[] Early life[] Offred was born around thirty years before the creation of the Republic of Gilead. Her mother was a second-wave feminist, who had a one-night stand with Offred's father with the sole purpose of getting pregnant. Offred's father had very little input into her upbringing, choosing to only send her birthday and Christmas cards occasionally. Offred's mother raised her alone and tried to bring up her daughter with her own values; that women were oppressed and needed to fight for their rights, but without much success; Offred herself states that she took much of her personal freedom for granted in the time prior to Gilead's creation. At some point in her life, Offred became best friends with a girl named Moira and they remained close for much of their adult lives. When she was very young, Offred's mother took her along to an anti-pornography rally and persuaded Offred to burn a pornographic magazine; at the time, Offred did not understand what the magazine meant. Adult life[] Offred attended college along with Moira and started working in an office. Round about this point, Offred met and fell in love with a married man named Luke. They started having an affair, often secretly meeting in hotel rooms in Boston. Eventually, Luke divorced his first wife and married Offred. When she was twenty-five, Offred gave birth to their child, a daughter. After her daughter was born, a delusional woman attempted to abduct her in a supermarket due to the fertility crisis. Fortunately, Offred caught the woman in the act and she was apprehended, with Offred's daughter being returned to her unharmed, to her great relief[8]. When Offred was thirty, the President was assassinated and the USA was placed under martial law for the public's safety. Offred soon discovered that her bank account was no longer valid and she and the other women were fired from their jobs on the same day. Offred learnt from Moira that women were no longer allowed to hold property. Because Luke had been previously married, Offred and Luke were targeted by the government, as in Gilead, only first marriages were considered valid. Realizing that this was the beginning of the formation of the oppressive state of Gilead, Offred and Luke attempted to flee with their daughter to Canada. Unfortunately, they were captured; Luke was shot trying to escape and Offred did not know if he was alive or dead, and Offred was separated from her daughter and sedated. Life following Gilead's creation[] Because Offred was one of the few women left who was able to bear children, she was sent to the Rachel and Leah, or 'Red Center' with many other fertile women to be indoctrinated into Gilead's belief system and trained to become Handmaids. There, Offred was reunited with Moira. After completing her training, Offred was sent to her first posting, which proved to be unsuccessful. Offred was reassigned, but her second posting did not result in pregnancy either. Offred was then sent to her third posting, at the house of Commander Fred and his wife Serena Joy, where she was given the name "Offred" or "Of-Fred". Offred's new Commander secretly begins inviting her to his study in the evenings, against Gilead's laws, talking with her and offering her contraband items such as hand lotion and fashion magazines. He also plays games such as Scrabble with her and confides in her, essentially conducting an emotional affair with her, which Offred goes along with, partly out of fear as to what Fred would do if she refuses, and partly because it is an opportunity for her to rebel and take back some power for herself. Offred finds herself growing attracted to Fred's personal driver, Nick, which she feels guilty over, believing she is being disloyal to Luke, clinging to the hope he is still alive. Offred befriends her shopping partner, Ofglen, after learning she does not truly believe in the regime. Offred is excited when Ofglen tells her about Mayday, an underground resistance working to bring down Gilead from within, and offers to let her join. Offred attends the birth of a baby to the Handmaid Ofwarren, whom Offred knew as Janine from the Red Center. Her life becomes more complicated than ever when Serena Joy approaches her and discusses making a deal; if Offred were to sleep with Nick to conceive, then Serena would give her information on her daughter. Desperate for any news of her daughter and to save herself from being declared an Unwoman, Offred agrees to the plan in spite of the risks of being caught and charged with fornication. One night, the Commander has Offred dress in a skimpy costume, heels and make-up, saying that they going out somewhere. Offred disguises herself with one of Serena's shawls and is taken to a hotel where she used to meet with Luke before they married, which has been converted into a secret brothel, Jezebel's. There, Offred is surprised to see Moira. The two women are briefly able to catch up. Although Offred is glad to see her old friend again, she is disheartened by how apathetic Moira seems to have become, she having given up any hope of breaking free after being captured. Moira also informs Offred she saw footage of her mother working in the Colonies. At first, Offred is relieved, as she thought her mother had been killed until Moira says she would be better off dead due to the terrible conditions at the Colonies. Offred realizes Moira is probably right and grieves for her mother, imagining what her life must be like now. The Commander brings Offred to a room, which is coincidentally the one she once stayed in with Luke and initiates sex between them. Offred realizes the Commander is treating this like a date, but she feels no attraction or a deeper connection to him and simply goes through the motions, as she does during the Ceremony. When she arrives home, an oblivious Serena Joy escorts her to see Nick. Offred willingly sleeps with Nick and does so on a regular basis. She becomes more reckless and stops caring about anything else; she has been deprived of affection for so long that she falls head over heels for Nick, telling him everything about herself in spite of the risks out of a desire to form a connection with him. She starts to believe she may be pregnant, though it is too early to tell and she admits it may just be wishful thinking. Offred receives a rather brutal wake-up call after attending a women's Salvaging and being forced to take part in a Particium, which greatly disturbs her, particularly when Ofglen reveals that the condemned was not a rapist as the Aunts claim, but a member of Mayday. When Offred goes to meet Ofglen the next day to go shopping, she is surprised and frightened when she is met by a different Handmaid, Ofglen's replacement, instead. Offred says the code words 'May day' to see if the woman is part of the resistance, however, it becomes clear that whilst the new Ofglen knows of Mayday, she does not support them and warns Offred against being subversive. Offred is terrified that Ofglen has been taken by the Eyes and will mention her rebellious acts to them under torture, and is overcome with relief when the new Ofglen breaks protocol and reveals that her predecessor committed suicide before the Eyes could get to her when she saw the van coming for her. Offred is saddened by Ofglen's death, but immensely grateful that she sacrificed herself to protect her and her comrades. Unfortunately, upon arriving home, Offred finds Serena waiting for her with the shawl she wore to Jezebel's, which has lipstick stains on it. Serena berates Offred for betraying her and seeing the Commander behind her back and orders her to her room. Offred silently obeys. She spends hours sitting in her room, contemplating what will happen to her now. She ponders trying to escape, committing suicide or even burning down the house with herself in it as a final act of defiance, but in the end, she does nothing. She sees the van of the Eyes drive up to the house and knows they have come to take her. Nick enters her room to take her down, leading Offred to believe he is an eye, which she feared all along. However, Nick tells her both he and the van are actually from Mayday and that she should go with them, as they will take her to safety. Offred is still wary of him and doesn't know what to believe, but realizes she has no choice either way. She calmly walks downstairs, passing Fred, Serena Joy and their Marthas Rita and Cora; she judges from Serena's reaction that she had no involvement in her arrest, which surprises her. Offred is lead outside to the van and steps up into it, accepting whatever fate awaits her. Fate[] What happens to Offred after she is taken away in the van is unknown. It is never confirmed whether it was Mayday rescuing her, or if she was being taken by the Eyes, after all, to be imprisoned. It is revealed in the epilogue that Offred at some point recorded her story on a series of tapes, disguised as ordinary music cassettes and hidden in an airtight tin, which was found decades later after the Republic of Gilead fell from power. The tapes are studied in universities and believed to be authentic, though due to Offred not having access to certain information or choosing not to mention it, as well as her using many pseudonyms in her story, presumably to protect her loved ones' identities, who she really was and what became of her are unknown. However, given that Offred was able to access a recording device, tell her story and successfully hide the tapes, this would imply that at some point she was able to escape Gilead, adding more weight to the possibility that it was Mayday who came for her towards the end of the novel. It remains unknown if Offred ever saw her daughter again, or if she was truly pregnant with Nick's child, as she believed. It is also hinted in the novel that her true first name could be June, as during a flashback at the Red Center, Offred mentions that she and the other Handmaids exchanged names. All the other women mentioned are brought up again at some point, save for June, indicating that June is Offred. Alternatively, June could be yet another pseudonym Offred chose. In The Testaments, Offred is revealed to be alive. She successfully escaped the Commander's household, and gave birth to Nick's daughter, Daisy, who was brought up in Canada by adoptive parents. Offred went underground in Gilead and, fifteen years later, was reunited with both her children. Relationships[] Cora: Offred likes Cora for respecting her privacy. When they're alone together, she's shy of Offred[9]. Quotes[] Notes[] The novel never directly mentions what Offred's original name was - probably intentionally, as pointed out in the epilogue, based on the narrative conceit that the book is a collection of audio recordings that Offred made, in which she intentionally avoided using people's real names for fear of exposure. For years, fans speculated that her real name is "June", based on a few stray clues: when the Handmaids imprisoned in the Rachel and Leah Center whisper their real names to each other, these names are all later given for other characters that Offred meets, i.e. Janine/Ofwarren. By process of elimination, "June" is the only name then spoken that another character doesn't later claim. There is of course the possibility that Atwood intended this as a red herring, that the in-universe Offred intentionally gave fake clues like this to throw anyone who found the tapes off her trail (just as she used pseudonyms for other named men in the story). The 1990 movie either didn't notice or abandoned this point, instead having Offred directly say her original name was "Kate". The 2017 TV series clearly states that her original name was in fact "June". The name June is derived from the Latin Juno, which was the name of the Roman goddess of marriage, childbirth and women, the wife of Jupiter, the ruler of the gods, and the Roman equivalent of the Greek Hera. This matches well with the different roles of Offred (whose real name is possibly June) plays: she is Luke's wife, a mother and later a "breeder" for the Republic of Gilead, and finally, a voice for the women of Gilead. Margaret Atwood herself explained in a new author's foreword to 2017 reprints of the novel that she never intended Offred's original name to be "June", and while she has heard the widespread theory pointing out that "June" is the one name from the Rachel and Leah Center that isn't linked to another character, this was pure coincidence and she never intended that to be a hint: "Why do we never learn the real name of the central character?. I have often been asked. Because, I reply, so many people throughout history have had their names changed or have simply disappeared from view. Some have deduced that Offred's real name is June, since, of all the names whispered among the Handmaids in the gymnasium/dormitory, June is the only one that never appears again. That was not my original thought, but it fits, so readers are welcome to it if they wish." References[]

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