



MARGARET ATWOOD

BOOKER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE BLIND ASSASSIN*

ALIAS GRACE

Alias Grace

Margaret Atwood

Foreword

In 1843, a 16-year-old Canadian housemaid named Grace Marks was tried for the murder of her employer and his mistress. The sensationalistic trial made headlines throughout the world, and the jury delivered a guilty verdict. Yet opinion remained fiercely divided about Marks—was she a spurned woman who had taken out her rage on two innocent victims, or was she an unwilling victim herself, caught up in a crime she was too young to understand? Such doubts persuaded the judges to commute her sentence to life imprisonment, and Marks spent the next 30 years in an assortment of jails and asylums, where she was often exhibited as a star attraction. In *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood reconstructs Marks's story in fictional form. Her portraits of 19th-century prison and asylum life are chilling in their detail. The author also introduces Dr. Simon Jordan, who listens to the prisoner's tale with a mixture of sympathy and disbelief. In his effort to uncover the truth, Jordan uses the tools of the then rudimentary science of psychology. But the last word belongs to the book's narrator—Grace herself. For the past twenty-five years, Margaret Atwood has written works of striking originality and imagination. *Alias Grace* proves once again that Atwood is one of the most talented, daring, and exciting writers of our time.

Born in Canada in 1939, Margaret Atwood lives in Toronto.

Whatever may have happened through these years, God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.

— WILLIAM MORRIS,

“The Defence of Guenevere.”

I have no Tribunal.

— EMILY DICKINSON,

Letters.

I cannot tell you what the light is, but I can tell you what it is not.... What is the motive of the light? What is the light?

— EUGENE MARAIS,

The Soul of the White Ant.

One - Jagged Edge

Chapter 1

Out of the gravel there are peonies growing. They come up through the loose grey pebbles, their buds testing the air like snails' eyes, then swelling and opening, huge dark-red flowers all shining and glossy like satin. Then they burst and fall to the ground.

In the one instant before they come apart they are like the peonies in the front garden at Mr. Kinnear's, that first day, only those were white. Nancy was cutting them. She wore a pale dress with pink rosebuds and a triple-flounced skirt, and a straw bonnet that hid her face. She carried a flat basket, to put the flowers in; she bent from the hips like a lady, holding her waist straight. When she heard us and turned to look, she put her hand up to her throat as if startled.

I tuck my head down while I walk, keeping step with the rest, eyes lowered, silently two by two around the yard, inside the square made by the high stone walls. My hands are clasped in front of me; they're chapped, the knuckles reddened. I can't remember a time when they were not like that. The toes of my shoes go in and out under the hem of my skirt, blue and white, blue and white, crunching on the pathway. These shoes fit me better than any I've ever had before.

It's 1851. I'll be twenty-four years old next birthday. I've been shut up in here since the age of sixteen. I am a model prisoner, and give no trouble. That's what the Governor's wife says, I have overheard her saying it. I'm skilled at overhearing. If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after

all they will let me go; but it's not easy being quiet and good, it's like hanging on to the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet it is taking all your strength. I watch the peonies out of the corners of my eyes. I know they shouldn't be here: it's April, and peonies don't bloom in April. There are three more now, right in front of me, growing out of the path itself. Furtively I reach out my hand to touch one. It has a dry feel, and I realize it's made of cloth. Then up ahead I see Nancy, on her knees, with her hair fallen over and the blood running down into her eyes. Around her neck is a white cotton kerchief printed with blue flowers, love-in-a-mist, it's mine. She's lifting up her face, she's holding out her hands to me for mercy; in her ears are the little gold earrings I used to envy, but I no longer begrudge them, Nancy can keep them, because this time it will all be different, this time I will run to help, I will lift her up and wipe away the blood with my skirt, I will tear a bandage from my petticoat and none of it will have happened. Mr. Kinnear will come home in the afternoon, he will ride up the driveway and McDermott will take the horse, and Mr. Kinnear will go into the parlour and I will make him some coffee, and Nancy will take it in to him on a tray the way she likes to do, and he will say What good coffee; and at night the fireflies will come out in the orchard, and there will be music, by lamplight. Jamie Walsh. The boy with the flute.

I am almost up to Nancy, to where she's kneeling. But I do not break step, I do not run, I keep on walking two by two; and then Nancy smiles, only the mouth, her eyes are hidden by the blood and hair, and then she scatters into patches of colour, a drift of red cloth petals across the stones. I put my hands over my eyes because it's dark suddenly, and a man is standing there with a candle, blocking the stairs that go up; and the cellar walls are all around me, and I know I will never get out. This is what I told Dr. Jordan, when we came to that part of the story. **Two - Rocky Road**

Chapter 2

THE MURDERS OF THOMAS KINNEAR, ESQ.

**AND OF HIS HOUSEKEEPER
NANCY MONTGOMERY**

AT RICHMOND HILL

AND THE TRIALS OF GRACE MARKS AND JAMES MCDERMOTT

AND THE HANGING OF JAMES MCDERMOTT

AT THE NEW GAOL IN TORONTO, NOVEMBER 21st, 1843.

Grace Marks she was a serving maid,

Her age was sixteen years,

McDermott was the stable hand,

They worked at Thomas Kinnear's.

Now Thomas Kinnear was a gentleman,

And a life of ease led he,

And he did love his housekeeper,

Called Nancy Montgomery.

O Nancy dear, do not despair,

To town I now must go,

To bring some money home for you,

From the Bank in Toronto.

O Nancy's no well-born lady,

O Nancy she is no queen,
And yet she goes in satin and silk,
The finest was ever seen.
O Nancy's no well-born lady,
Yet she treats me like a slave,
She works me so hard from dawn to dark,
She'll work me into my grave.
Now Grace, she loved good Thomas Kinnear,
McDermott he loved Grace,
And 'twas these loves as I do tell
That brought them to disgrace.
O Grace, please be my own true love,
O no it cannot be,
Unless you kill for my dear sake,
Nancy Montgomery.
He struck a blow all with his axe,
On the head of Nancy fair,
He dragged her to the cellar door
And threw her down the stairs.
O spare my life McDermott,

O spare my life, said she,
O spare my life, Grace Marks she said,
And I'll give you my dresses three.
O 'tis not for my own sake,
Nor yet my babe unborn,
But for my true love, Thomas Kinnear,
I'd live to see the morn.
McDermott held her by the hair,
And Grace Marks by the head,
And these two monstrous criminals,
They strangled her till dead.
What have I done, my soul is lost,
And for my life I fear!
Then to save ourselves, when he returns.
We must murder Thomas Kinnear.
O no, O no, I beg not so,
I plead for his life full sore!
No he must die, for you have sworn
You'd be my paramour.
Now Thomas Kinnear came riding home,

And on the kitchen floor
McDermott shot him through the heart
And he weltered in his gore.
The peddler came up to the house,
Will you buy a dress of me;
O go away Mr. Peddler,
I've dresses enough for three.
The butcher came up to the house,
He came there every week;
O go away Mr. Butcher,
We've got enough fresh meat!
They robbed Kinnear of his silver,
They robbed him of his gold,
They stole his horse and wagon,
And to Toronto they rode.
All in the middle of the night,
To Toronto they did flee,
Then across the Lake to the United States,
Thinking they would scape free.
She took McDermott by the hand,

As bold as bold could be,
And stopped at the Lewiston Hotel,
Under the name of Mary Whitney.
The corpses were found in the cellar,
Her face it was all black,
And she was under the washtub,
And he was laid out on his back.
Then Bailiff Kingsmill in pursuit,
A Charter he did take,
Which sailed as fast as it could go
To Lewiston, across the Lake.
They had not been in bed six hours,
Six hours or maybe more,
When to the Lewiston Hotel he came,
And knocked upon the door.
O who is there, said Grace so fair,
What business have you with me?
O you have murdered good Thomas Kinnear,
And Nancy Montgomery.
Grace Marks she stood up in the dock,