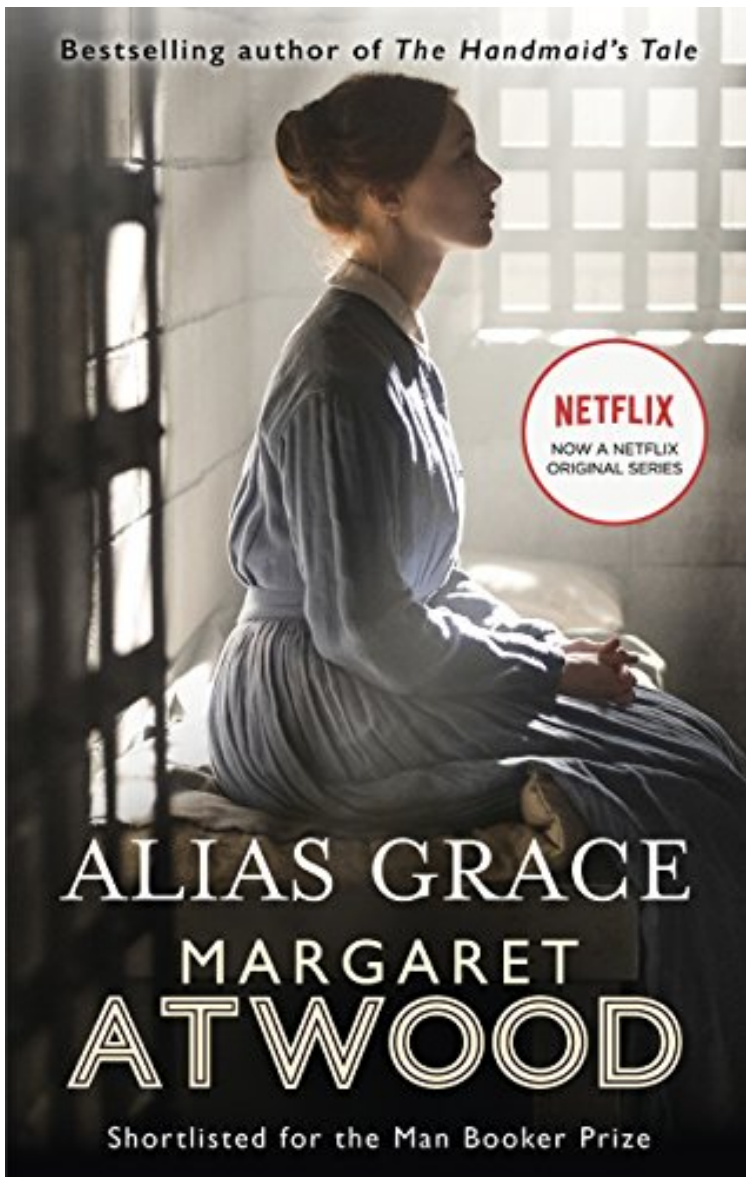


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Alias Grace (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBy the author of The Handmaid's TaleSoon to be a major NETFLIX seriesSometimes I whisper it over to myself: Murderess. Murderess. It rustles, like a taffeta skirt along the floor.' Grace Marks.

Female fiend? Femme fatale? Or weak and unwilling victim? Around the true story of one of the most enigmatic and notorious women of the 1840s, Margaret Atwood has created an extraordinarily potent tale of sexuality, cruelty and mystery.'Brilliant... Atwood's prose is searching. So intimate it seems to be written on the skin' Hilary Mantel'The outstanding novelist of our age' Sunday Times'A sensuous, perplexing book, at once sinister and dignified, grubby and gorgeous, panoramic yet specific...I don't think I have ever been so thrilled' Julie Myerson, Independent on Sunday.comIn 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.

Extrait 1859. I am sitting on the purple velvet settee in the Governor's parlour, the Governor's wife's parlour; it has always been the Governor's wife's parlour although it is not always the same wife, as they change them around according to the politics. I have my hands folded in my lap the proper way although I have no gloves. The gloves I would wish to have would be smooth and white, and would be without a wrinkle. I am often in this parlour, clearing away the tea things and dusting the small tables and the long mirror with the frame of grapes and leaves around its and the pianoforte; and the tall clock that came from Europe, with the orange-gold sun and the silver moon, that go in and out according to the time of day and the week of the month. I like the clock best of anything in the parlour, although it measures time and I have too much of that on my hands already. But I have never sat down on the settee before, as it is for the guests. Mrs. Alderman Parkinson said a lady must never sit in a chair a gentleman has just vacated, though she would not say why; but Mary Whitney said, Because, you silly goose, it's still warm from his bum; which was a coarse thing to say. So I cannot sit here without thinking of the ladylike bums that have sat on this very settee, all delicate and white, like wobbly softboiled eggs. The visitors wear afternoon dresses with rows of buttons up their fronts, and stiff wire crinolines beneath. It's a wonder they can sit down at all, and when they walk, nothing touches their legs under the billowing skirts, except their shifts and stockings. They are like swans, drifting along on unseen feet; or else like the jellyfish in the waters of the rocky harbour near our house, when I was little, before I ever made the long sad journey across the ocean. They were bell-shaped and ruffled, gracefully waving and lovely under the sea; but if they washed up on the beach and dried out in the sun there was nothing left of them. And that is what the ladies are like: mostly water. There were no wire crinolines when I was first brought here. They were horsehair then, as the wire ones were not thought of. I have looked at them hanging in the wardrobes, when I go in to tidy and empty the slops. They are like birdcages; but what is being caged in? Legs, the legs of ladies; legs penned in so they cannot get out and go rubbing up against the gentlemen's trousers. The Governor's wife never says legs, although the newspapers said legs when they were talking about Nancy, with her dead legs sticking out from under the washtub. It isn't only the jellyfish ladies that come. On Tuesdays we have the Woman Question, and the emancipation of this or that, with reform-minded persons of both sexes; and on Thursdays the Spiritualist Circle, for tea and conversing with the dead, which is a comfort to the Governor's wife because of her departed infant son. But mainly it is the ladies. They sit sipping from the thin cups, and the Governor's wife rings a little china bell. She does not like being the Governor's wife, she would prefer the Governor to be the governor of something other than a prison. The Governor had good enough friends to get him made the Governor, but not for anything else. So here she is, and she must make the most of her social position and accomplishments, and although an object of fear, like a spider, and of charity as well, I am also one of the accomplishments. I come into the room and curtsy and move about, mouth straight, head bent, and I pick up the cups or set them down, depending; and they stare without appearing to, out from under their bonnets. The reason they want to see me is that I am a celebrated murderess. Or that is what has been written down. When I first saw it I was surprised because they say Celebrated Singer and Celebrated Poetess and Celebrated Spiritualist and Celebrated Actress, but what is there to celebrate about murder? All the same, Murderess is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that wordmusky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase. Sometimes at night I whisper it over to myself. Murderess, Murderess. It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor. Murderer is merely brutal. It's like a hammer, or a lump of metal. I would rather be a murderess than a murderer, if those are the only choices. Sometimes when I am dusting the mirror with the grapes I look at myself in it, although I know it is vanity. In the afternoon light of the parlour my skin is a pale mauve, like a faded bruise, and my teeth are greenish. I think of all the things that have been written about methat I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will

and in danger of my own life, that I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder, that I am fond of animals, that I am very handsome with a brilliant complexion, that I have blue eyes, that I have green eyes, that I have auburn and also brown hair, that I am tall and also not above the average height, that I am well and decently dressed, that I robbed a dead woman to appear so, that I am brisk and smart about my work, that I am of a sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper, that I have the appearance of a person rather above my humble station, that I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot.

And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once? It was my own lawyer, Mr. Kenneth MacKenzie, Esq., who told them I was next door to an idiot. I was angry with him over that, but he said it was by far my best chance and I should not appear to be too intelligent. He said he would plead my case to the utmost of his ability, because whatever the truth of the matter I was little more than a child at the time, and he supposed it came down to free will and whether or not one held with it. He was a kind gentleman although I could not make head nor tail of much of what he said, but it must have been good pleading. The newspapers wrote that he performed heroically against overwhelming odds. Though I don't know why they called it pleading, as he was not pleading but trying to make all of the witnesses appear immoral or malicious, or else mistaken. I wonder if he ever believed a word I said. When I have gone out of the room with the tray, the ladies look at the Governor's wife's scrapbook. Oh imagine, I feel quite faint, they say, and You let that woman walk around loose in your house, you must have nerves of iron, my own would never stand it. Oh well one must get used to such things in our situation, we are virtually prisoners ourselves you know, although one must feel pity for these poor benighted creatures, and after all she was trained as a servant, and it's as well to keep them employed, she is a wonderful seamstress, quite deft and accomplished, she is a great help in that way especially with the girls' frocks, she has an eye for trimmings, and under happier circumstances she could have made an excellent milliner's assistant. Although naturally she can be here only during the day, I would not have her in the house at night. You are aware that she has spent time in the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto, seven or eight years ago it was, and although she appears to be perfectly recovered you never know when they may get carried away again, sometimes she talks to herself and sings out loud in a most peculiar manner. One cannot take chances, the keepers conduct her back in the evenings and lock her up properly, otherwise I wouldn't be able to sleep a wink. Oh I don't blame you, there is only so far one can go in Christian charity, a leopard cannot change its spots and no one could say you have not done your duty and shown a proper feeling. The Governor's wife's scrapbook is kept on the round table with the silk shawl covering it, branches like vines intertwined, with flowers and red fruit and blue birds, it is really one large tree and if you stare at it long enough the vines begin to twist as if a wind is blowing them. It was sent from India by her eldest daughter who is married to a missionary, which is not a thing I would care to do myself. You would be sure to die early, if not from the rioting natives as at Cawnpore with horrid outrages committed on the persons of respectable gentlewomen, and a mercy they were all slaughtered and put out of their misery, for only think of the shame; then from the malaria, which turns you entirely yellow, and you expire in raving fits; in any case before you could turn around, there you would be, buried under a palm tree in a foreign clime. I have seen pictures of them in the book of Eastern engravings the Governor's wife takes out when she wishes to shed a tear. On the same round table is the stack of Godey's Ladies' Books with the fashions that come up from the States, and also the Keepsake Albums of the two younger daughters. Miss Lydia tells me I am a romantic figure; but then the two of them are so young they hardly know what they are saying. Sometimes they pry and tease; they say, Grace, why don't you ever smile or laugh, we never see you smiling, and I say I suppose Miss I have gotten out of the way of it. My face won't bend in that direction any more. But if I laughed out loud I might not be able to stop; and also it would spoil their romantic notion of me. Romantic people are not supposed to laugh, I know that much from looking at the pictures. The daughters put all kinds of things into their albums, little scraps of cloth from their dresses, little snippets of ribbon, pictures cut from magazines the Ruins of Ancient Rome, the Picturesque Monasteries of the French Alps, Old London Bridge, Niagara Falls in summer and in winter, which is a thing I would like to see as all say it is very impressive, and portraits of Lady This and Lord That from England. And their friends write things in their graceful handwriting, To Dearest Lydia from your Eternal Friend, Clara Richards; To Dearest Marianne In Memory of Our Splendid Picnic on the Shores of Bluest Lake Ontario. And also poems: As round about the sturdy Oak Entwines the loving Ivy Vine, My Faith so true, I pledge to You, 'Twill evermore be none but Thine, Your Faithful Laura. Or else: Although from you I far must roam, Do not be broken hearted, We two who in the Soul are One Are never truly parted. Your Lucy. This young lady

was shortly afterwards drowned in the Lake when her ship went down in a gale, and nothing was ever found but her box with her initials done in silver nails; it was still locked, so although damp, nothing spilt out, and Miss Lydia was given a scarf out of it as a keepsake. When I am dead and in my grave And all my bones are rotten, When this you see, remember me, Lest I should be forgotten. That one is signed, I will always be with you in Spirit, Your loving 'Nancy', Hannah Edmonds, and I must say the first time I saw that, it gave me a fright, although of course it was a different Nancy. Still, the rotten bones. They would be, by now. Her face was all black by the time they found her, there must have been a dreadful smell. It was so hot then, it was July, still she went off surprisingly soon, you'd think she would have kept longer in the dairy, it is usually cool down there. I am certainly glad I was not present, as it would have been very distressing. I don't know why they are all so eager to be remembered. What good will it do them? There are some things that should be forgotten by everyone, and never spoken of again. The Governor's wife's scrapbook is quite different. Of course she is a grown woman and not a young girl, so although she is just as fond of remembering, what she wants to remember is not violets or a picnic. No Dearest and Love and Beauty, no Eternal Friends, none of those things for her; what it has instead is all the famous criminals in it the ones that have been hanged, or else brought here to be penitent, because this is a Penitentiary and you are supposed to repent while in it, and you will do better if you say you have done so, whether you have anything to repent of or not. The Governor's wife cuts these crimes out of the newspapers and pastes them in; she will even write away for old newspapers with crimes that were done before her time. It is her collection, she is a lady and they are all collecting things these days, and so she must collect something, and she does this instead of pulling up ferns or pressing flowers, and in any case she likes to horrify her acquaintances. So I have read what they put in about me. She showed the scrapbook to me herself, I suppose she wanted to see what I would do; but I've learnt how to keep my face still, I made my eyes wide and flat, like an owl's in torchlight, and I said I had repented in bitter tears, and was now a changed person, and would she wish me to remove the tea things now; but I've looked in there since, many times, when I've been in the parlour by myself. A lot of it is lies. They said in the newspaper that I was illiterate, but I could read some even then. I was taught early by my mother, before she got too tired for it, and I did my sampler with leftover thread, A is for Apple, B is for Bee; and also Mary Whitney used to read with me, at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's, when we were doing the mending; and I've learnt a lot more since being here, as they teach you on purpose. They want you to be able to read the Bible, and also tracts, as religion and thrashing are the only remedies for a depraved nature and our immortal souls must be considered. It is shocking how many crimes the Bible contains. The Governor's wife should cut them all out and paste them into her scrapbook. They did say some true things. They said I had a good character; and that was so, because nobody had ever taken advantage of me, although they tried. But they called James McDermott my paramour. They wrote it down, right in the newspaper. I think it is disgusting to write such things down. That is what really interests them the gentlemen and the ladies both. They don't care if I killed anyone, I could have cut dozens of throats, it's only what they admire in a soldier, they'd scarcely blink. No: was I really a paramour, is their chief concern, and they don't even know themselves whether they want the answer to be no or yes. I'm not looking at the scrapbook now, because they may come in at any moment. I sit with my rough hands folded, eyes down, staring at the flowers in the Turkey carpet. Or they are supposed to be flowers. They have petals the shape of the diamonds on a playing card; like the cards spread out on the table at Mr. Kinnear's, after the gentlemen had been playing the night before. Hard and angular. But red, a deep thick red. Thick strangled tongues.