

BY MARGARET ATWOOD

FICTION

- The Edible Woman* (1969)
Surfacing (1972)
Lady Oracle (1976)
Dancing Cat (1977)
Life Before Man (1979)
Boothamptons (1980)
Winter in the Dark (1983)
Barometer: Egg (1983)
The Handmaid's Tale (1985)
Cat's Eye (1988)
Wilderness Typo (1991)
Good Bones (1992)
The Robber Bride (1993)
Bones & Marrow (1995)
Alias Grace (1996)
The Blind Assassin (2000)
Oryx and Crake (2003)
The Penelopiad (2005)
The Tent (2006)
Mind Disorder (2006)
The Year of the Flood (2009)
MaddAddam (2013)
Stone Mattress (2014)
The Heart Goes Last (2015)
Flag-Seed (2016)

FOR CHILDREN

- Up in the Tree* (1978)
Anna's Pet [with Joyce Barkhouse]
(1983)
For the Birds (1990)
*Princess Prunella and the Purple
Peanut* (1995)
*Rude Ramsay and the Roaring
Radishes* (2003)
Backful Bob and Doleful Dorinda
(2004)

NON-FICTION

- Survival: A Thematic Guide to
Canadian Literature* (1972)
Days of the Rebels 1815-1840
(1977)
Second Words (1982)
*Strange Things: The Malevolent
North in Canadian Literature* (1996)
Two Solitudes: Conversations
[with Victor-Lévy Beauchamp]
(1998)
On Writers and Writing (2002)
Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing
(2005)
*Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side
of Wealth* (2008)
*In Other Worlds: SF and the
Human Imagination* (2011)

POETRY

- Double Persephone* (1961)
The Circle Game (1966)
The Animals in That Country
(1968)
The Journals of Susanna Moodie
(1970)
Procedures for Underground (1970)
Power Politics (1971)
You Are Happy (1974)
Selected Poems (1976)
Two-Headed Poems (1978)
True Stories (1981)
Interlunar (1984)
*Selected Poems II: Poems Selected
and New 1976-1986* (1986)
Morning in the Burned House (1995)
*Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-
1995* (1986)
The Door (2007)

MARGARET
ATWOOD

THE EDIBLE WOMAN



virago

screaming after what Joe called 'an accident' behind the living-room door.

'It was no accident,' Clara remarked, opening her eyes. 'He just loves peeing behind doors. I wonder what it is. He's going to be secretive when he grows up, an undercover agent or a diplomat or something. The furtive little bastard.'

Joe saw us to the door, a pile of dirty laundry in his arms. 'You must come and see us again soon,' he said, 'Clara has a few people she can really talk to.'

We walked down towards the subway in the semi-dusk, through the sound of crickets and muffled television sets (in some of the houses we could see them flickering blue through the open windows) and a smell of warm tar. My skin felt stifled, as though I was enclosed in a layer of moist dough. I was afraid Ainsley hadn't enjoyed herself: her silence was negative.

'Dinner wasn't bad,' I said, wanting to be loyal to Clara, who was after all an older friend than Ainsley; 'Joe's turning into quite a good cook.'

'How can she stand it?' Ainsley said with more vehemence than usual. 'She just lies there and that man does all the work! She lets herself be treated like a *thing!*'

'Well, she is seven months pregnant,' I said. 'And she's never been well.'

'*She's* not well!' Ainsley said indignantly. 'She's flourishing; it's him that's not well. He's aged even since I've known him and that's less than four months. She's draining all his energy.'

'What do you suggest?' I said. I was annoyed with Ainsley: she couldn't see Clara's position.

'Well, she should *do* something; if only a token gesture. She never finished her degree, did she? Wouldn't this be a perfect time for her to work on it? Lots of pregnant women finish their degrees.'

I remembered poor Clara's resolutions after the first baby: she had thought of it as only a temporary absence. After the

second she had wailed, 'I don't know what we're doing wrong! I always try to be so careful'. She had always been against the pill - she thought it might change her personality - but gradually she had become less adamant. She had read a French novel (in translation) and a book about archaeological expeditions in Peru and had talked about night school. Lately she had taken to making bitter remarks about being 'just a housewife'. 'But Ainsley,' I said, 'you're always saying that a degree is no real indication of anything.'

'Of course the degree in itself isn't,' Ainsley said, 'it's what it stands for. She should get organized.'

When we were back at the apartment I thought of Len, and decided it wasn't too late to call him. He was in, and after we'd exchanged greetings I told him I would love to see him.

'Great,' he said, 'when and where? Make it some place cool. I didn't remember it was so bloody hot in the summers over here.'

'Then you shouldn't have come back,' I said, hinting that I knew why he had and giving him an opening.

'It was safer,' he said with a touch of smugness. 'Give them an inch and they'll take a mile.' He had acquired a slight English accent. 'By the way, Clara tells me you've got a new roommate.'

'She isn't your type,' I said. Ainsley had gone into the living-room and was sitting on the chesterfield with her back to me.

'Oh, you mean too old, like you, eh?' My being too old was one of his jokes.

I laughed. 'Let's say tomorrow night,' I said. It had suddenly struck me that Len would be a perfect distraction for Peter. 'About eight-thirty at the Park Plaza. I'll bring a friend along to meet you.'

'Aha,' said Len, 'this fellow Clara told me about. Not serious, are you?'

'Oh no, not at all,' I said to reassure him.

When I had hung up Ainsley said, 'Was that Len Slank you were talking to?'

I said yes.

'What does he look like?' she asked casually.

I couldn't refuse to tell her. 'Oh, sort of ordinary. I don't think you'd find him attractive. He has blond curly hair and horn-rimmed glasses. Why?'

'I just wondered.' She got up and went into the kitchen. 'Want a drink?' she called.

'No thanks,' I said, 'but you could bring me a glass of water.' I moved into the living-room and went to the window seat where there was a breeze.

She came back in with a scotch on the rocks for herself and handed me my glass of water. Then she sat down on the floor. 'Marian,' she said, 'I have something I need to tell you.'

Her voice was so serious that I was immediately worried. 'What's wrong?'

'I'm going to have a baby,' she said quietly.

I took a quick drink of water. I couldn't imagine Ainsley making a miscalculation like that. 'I don't believe you.'

She laughed. 'Oh, I don't mean I'm already pregnant. I mean I'm going to get pregnant.'

I was relieved, but puzzled. 'You mean you're going to get married?' I asked, thinking of Trigger's misfortune. I tried to guess which of them Ainsley could be interested in, without success; ever since I'd known her she had been decidedly anti-marriage.